

**Shifting (A)Genders: Gender, Disability and the  
Cyborg in American Women's Science Fiction**

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## **Abstract**

Shifting (A)Genders examines the representation of cyborgs in post-war American women's science fiction, focusing on issues relating to gender and disability. Drawing on ideas expounded in Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1985) and theories of disability that conceptualise the disabled subject as a figure that disrupts the human and gender identity, it explores the ways in which novels by C.L. Moore, Anne McCaffrey, James Tiptree Jr., Joan D. Vinge, Lois McMaster Bujold and Marge Piercy highlight the emancipatory potential of technology for marginalised subjects. While critics argue that Haraway's theory of the cyborg is idealistic, failing to consider the materiality of the body, this thesis demonstrates that representations of the human-machine in women's writing emerge at particular historical moments confronting gender stereotypes in science fiction when gender relations are unstable in American society. Situating texts in their socio-historical context, I argue that women writers portray cyborgs differently to male writers and challenge western heteropatriarchal concepts of the human subject. The thesis identifies a shift in focus from representations of female to male cyborgs in women's writing, which reflect changing perceptions of the gendered and disabled body. It also asserts that anxieties about the instability of gender can be related to moments of social upheaval that define post-war America.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis focuses on the representation of gender and disability in cyborg narratives by American women science fiction writers produced between the closing stages of World War II and the early 1990s – a time line reflecting the emergence of the cyborg in women's writing that anticipates Haraway's cyborg theory, and ending with a feminist text that critically evaluates it. A main concern is to understand the political implications of women's writing that utilises the science fiction trope of the cyborg figure. The cyborg as an adapted, altered or constructed human has received attention from men writing in the field of science fiction. However, I intend to demonstrate how women's writing about the cyborg differs from their male counterparts. For example, the representation of gender and disability in relation to the cyborg figure in men's writing has served to shore up values that constitute human identity, restoring normative gender roles that reflect male and female stereotypes in western society. In contrast, I argue that women writers have utilised disability and the cyborg to disrupt and question gender identity.

To date, the representation of impairment in cyborg texts produced by women has been viewed in a negative light. A common assumption about impairment in the cyborg texts I discuss is how disability serves as a negative trope, emphasising the inferiority of the gendered body, particularly the body that is female and therefore already marked as feminine. For example, Jane Donawerth argues that 'Woman as machine is frequently represented as already dehumanized by some deformity, before granted the machinery that saves her life yet still marks her as deformed' (63). Alternatively, I consider disability as an identity that positively contributes to feminist debates about women, men and

technology. The texts I have chosen to analyse demonstrate both the negative and the positive implications of the disabled body in women's science fiction and I will utilise Donna Haraway's cyborg theory to explore this. Therefore, to begin, I will briefly outline how I am using and defining disability in relation to feminism and technology. I will then introduce Haraway's cyborg figure and explain how her theory informs my reading of the cyborg in this thesis. Following this, the thesis will discuss the representation of the cyborg in American science fiction and consider the cyborg in everyday life. From this discussion, I will explain further how and why Haraway has interpreted the cyborg as a figure conducive to feminist politics. Furthermore, by looking at how different critics have read Haraway's thoughts on the cyborg, I will establish the relationship between the cyborg figure and gender and disability studies. The thesis will then explain the significance of the cyborg in women's science fiction, offering an outline of each chapter. Placing each text within its socio-historical context, I will discuss its relationship to gender and disability, stating the reasons why I have chosen each particular text for analysis.

### **Feminism, Disability and Technology**

Feminism and disability studies are disciplines that take the body as their central project. Feminism explores and questions the cultural representation of the female body as physically different to that of the male body, where women are granted the social position of an inferior castrated male. Scholars working in the field of disability studies explore physical impairment as a form of physical difference and a different way of being in the world. Disability studies, like feminism, focuses on embodiment and physical difference as an experience of

‘Otherness’. ‘Otherness’ is closely associated with the limitations, vulnerability, and frailty of the lived body. Therefore, women and those living with disability possess bodies that are socially de-valued and marked by cultural values of lack. At the same time, they are subjects who provide open and intimate accounts of the lived body - a body that is often affected by or forced to rely on technology in order to survive. The interdependent relationship of the body with technology highlights the fact that all bodies are limited and that biologically and socially all bodies can alter and change in value. In both women’s and disability writing, the body is presented as a material entity as well as a readable text that alters in meaning according to different socio-historical and cultural contexts. In feminism and disability studies, the body is a political project that is historically contingent, an entity that is ontologically incomplete and in constant process, ceaselessly shifting and changing, refuting the singularity and stability of identity.

In science fiction and discourses of science and technology, the gendered and impaired body is portrayed as a liminal body that can literally be made, unmade and remade by technology. While this often serves to re-affirm oppressive ‘norms’ of gender and ability in western culture, it also provides an opportunity to question these ‘norms’. For instance, technologies such as cosmetic surgery can exaggerate or destabilise the gendered body, complicating and questioning western dualisms of self and ‘Other’, a duality upon which the ideological formation of ‘natural’ gender hierarchies depend. Similarly, technology can complicate the ability/disability dichotomy that creates a hierarchy between able and disabled-bodied subjects. For example, when technology normalises or corrects deficiencies that are commonplace in society, such as the development of optical lenses for impaired eyesight, categories that define the

able/disabled body are altered and revealed to be historically contingent and subject to change. Overall, in relation to discourses of science and technology, feminism and disability studies can offer new perspectives and interpretations of the body, re-evaluating and subverting the negative connotations of physical difference and ‘Otherness’ that is normally associated with the female and disabled body. To explain further, I will now turn to the work of Donna Haraway and the figure of the cyborg.

### **Haraway’s Cyborg**

In her essay ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, originally published in 1985,<sup>1</sup> feminist and cultural theorist Donna Haraway famously states that ‘A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction’ (149). As Haraway implies, the cyborg is a figure that exists both in science and science fiction. It is a popular icon that straddles the real and the imaginary, the present and the future. The cyborg is a material and discursive figure that tells us what is humanly possible in science while also fuelling the imagination to speculate on alternative future possibilities. For example, a literal cybernetic organism is a human being who incorporates technology into their body either to maintain normal function or to enhance

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<sup>1</sup> The original 1985 publication ‘A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s’ appeared in Socialist Review and is different from Haraway’s updated version, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, which is in her book Simian’s Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (1991). The later version has the additional section ‘Cyborgs: A Myth of Political Identity’ where Haraway discusses the cyborg in relation to science fiction. Throughout, I use the latter, updated ‘Cyborg Manifesto’ published in 1991.



performance.<sup>2</sup> However, as Haraway argues, in contemporary culture the cyborg has become a metaphor for most human-machine interactions ranging from physical organic-machine couplings, to reproductive technologies and artificial intelligence, to mind/body/tool analogies that consider how technology shapes or alters human experience. In Haraway's view, technology has become so pervasive that she claims, 'By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short we are cyborgs' (150). Haraway does not mean that 'we are cyborgs' in the sense that we are all fitted with mechanical parts and prosthetic devices but, rather, that developments in science and scientific discourses have broken down the distinctions that separate the human from its 'Others' (151-153).

In western culture, the 'Other' is something or someone that is both like and unlike the human, and disturbs and unsettles categories that define the human. According to Haraway, American scientific culture has blurred the boundaries that separate human and animal, organism and machine, and the physical and non-physical (151-153). For example, no longer is the human understood as unique and separate from animals. Instead, humans and animals are viewed in terms of shared qualities, traits and kinships. As Haraway states, 'language, tool use, social behaviour, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal' (152-153). Similarly, developments in machines, according to Haraway, have made 'thoroughly ambiguous the difference between the natural and artificial, mind and body, [...] and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines' (152). Finally, in the metaphysical realm of abstract

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<sup>2</sup> In 1960 Clynes and Kline coined the term 'Cyborg' stating, 'The Cyborg deliberately incorporates exogenous components extending the self-regulatory control function of the organism in order to adapt it to new environments' (31).

thought, where the physical and non-physical intersect, Haraway argues that 'modern machinery', such as microelectronics and the 'silicon chip', that are 'everywhere and invisible', question western concepts of God and human spirituality (153).

Haraway is excited about the cyborg's potential to unsettle the human because of the implications this has for women, gender and language. In western philosophy the human is defined as a complete, organic, self-sufficient subject and is encoded as male and masculine. The cyborg, in contrast, is a composite of organic and machine that is physically different to the human and is gendered feminine. Conventionally, in patriarchal culture the cyborg, as a figure encoded as feminine, is subordinate to the human male subject. However, Haraway argues that because the cyborg has emerged in recent culture as a metaphor for subverting gender hierarchies in patriarchal language, the cyborg's subordinate status is changing. The human is an exclusive identity that relies on a feminine subject like the cyborg for definition. Alternatively, the cyborg is a feminine figure that is inclusive of diversity and difference and is oppositional to the human.

I am aware that Haraway's desire to subvert patriarchal language is idealistic and that there are limitations to her cyborg theory. Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' is a relativistic approach to discourse which argues that feminist re-appropriations of scientific discourses can only be seen as more interpretations within many incomplete forms of knowledge competing for dominance. Nonetheless, despite this limitation, Haraway astutely recognises the tension that exists between western liberal ideals that constitute human and gender identity and the unequal foundations of a capitalist system underpinning it, in order to investigate the progressive possibilities inherent in capitalist society (Halliwell and

Mousely 175). Therefore, Haraway's cyborg is important. It is a figure that illuminates the contradictions of capitalist society and the instability of patriarchal culture. Through the cyborg figure, Haraway calls to feminists to critically embrace science and technology. She argues that in contemporary culture science and technology has become increasingly feminised and, although exploitative, it is a system that can be turned to the advantage of women (Haraway 166-168). Consequently, Haraway considers that in the cultural climate of late capitalism there is an opportunity to flip over gender hierarchies and to examine how science and technology can be incorporated to confuse traditional gender binary systems. It is also a moment in time to bring to the fore those most marginalised such as those with disabilities. In this respect, one of the most interesting aspects of Haraway's writing is her argument for bringing together people, not so much in terms of a common 'essence', but because of their ability to incorporate technology into their lives, or, more radically, to merge technology into their very being, to be neither organism nor machine, self and 'Other, but to be both (Haraway 178). Ultimately, Haraway does not see that the body should be limited by gender hierarchies but argues that the body is an end for new technological beginnings and possibilities, a collaboration that can potentially break through rigid, fixed binary systems.

Overall, Haraway emphasises that the cyborg is a feminine identity. It is a feminist political strategy for including women and those marked as 'Other'. It is a strategy that embraces the possibilities of the cyborg to empower women and other marginal subjects to question, and subvert patriarchal technology and language that dominates and subordinates their existence. Haraway's insight into the gendered identity of the cyborg is reflected in science fiction. In men's

science fiction, identities that are marked as 'Other' can take the form of the alien, the cyborg, or the robot, and are often used to emphasise the superiority of the human male subject. In women's writing, the alien, cyborg and robot are alternative identities that have been used to explore inequalities generated by physical difference (Lefanu 77). In cyborg narratives that explore the reconstruction of the impaired subject, I argue that women have used the figure of the cyborg to deconstruct human and gender identity. In the discussion to follow, I establish how men have used the cyborg to affirm the human and masculinity in order to reassure patriarchy's domination and control over technology and the feminine 'Other'.

### **The Cyborg in Men's Science Fiction**

In American science fiction, speculation on the reconstruction of the disabled/destroyed body into a human-machine emerged during the closing stages of World War II coinciding with and anticipating advances in the development of prosthetics and a new science called cybernetics.<sup>3</sup> Cybernetics incorporated theories about communication, engineering and biology, establishing a scientific discourse that associated humans with machines (Hayles 84). Of significance was the work of scientist Norbert Wiener who calculated human-machine response times between pilots and their fighter planes in order to perfect anti-aircraft

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<sup>3</sup> There are a few examples of science fiction narratives that speculate on the augmentation of the disabled subject which precede this date and are by French and Russian writers. For example, see Arthur B. Evans's 'The Fantastic Science Fiction of Maurice Renard' (1994) and his discussion on Renard's novel *L'Homme truque* (The Altered Man) published in 1921 (5-6), and Alexander Beliaev's 'Invisible Light' published in 1938 (6). Also, see John J. Pierce's *Foundations of Science Fiction* (1987) and his discussion on artificially adapted men in science fiction (73). The time-line that I propose reflects a response to scientific and technological developments and gender anxieties in North America by American women and men science fiction writers at the end of World War II. For example, such as C.L. Moore's 'No Woman Born' (1944) and Henry Kuttner's 'Camouflage' (1945) which are the focus of discussion in Chapter One.

weaponry.<sup>4</sup> Wiener's work suggested how technology could extend the capabilities of humans, giving scientific grounding to the concept of a human-machine relationship that we now commonly imagine as the cyborg figure.

The human-machine in cybernetics resonated with wartime images of modern prosthetics. As David Serlin explains in 'The Other Arms Race' (2004), it was a time when media images of disabled war veterans and 'the triumphant use of their prostheses' offered a positive fantasy of a human-machine relationship (52). This popular image of the disabled war veteran was also extremely problematic because, as Serlin also points out, 'the rehabilitation of amputees [...] was geared towards making able-bodied people more comfortable [...] with the disabled (52). To explain, rehabilitation programmes focused on encouraging individuals to use their prosthetics to regain a normal life. This meant that an amputee's goal was to achieve the human and gendered norms of western culture. I agree with Serlin. Nonetheless, I also consider that the disabled war veteran as a human-machine fantasy helped shape a particular strand of cyborg literature. Utilising the concept of the rehabilitated disabled body, this literature often represented men as augmented beings, such as a human-spaceships or human-weapons, expressing patriarchal desires about men as invincible and immortal human-machines, who could endure hostile environments and situations, pioneering new frontiers for the good of humanity, while also expressing society's fears about the human becoming obsolete in a new technological age.

Human-machine narratives provided meditations on what it might mean to be different in a world dominated by humans, offering insight into a cyborg's

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<sup>4</sup> N. Katherine Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) lists the range of hardware Wiener helped produce for the military such as 'self-correcting radar tuning, automated anti-aircraft fire, torpedoes, and guided missiles' (Hayles 86).

subjective experience of 'Otherness'. At the same time, male writers revealed a gender bias in their work that favoured the superior status of the human male subject over the cyborg figure. Usually, this took the form of some kind of proof, or reassurance, that the human is central to the cyborg's existence, reasserting male authority and masculine control over the machine components that comprise the cyborg's identity. Examples include Henry Kuttner's short story 'Camouflage' published in 1945, followed by cyborg narratives of the 1950s, such as Bernard Wolfe's novel Limbo (1952), Poul Anderson's 'Call me Joe' (1957), and Robert Heinlein's military space opera Starship Troopers (1959). In 1968, there is Damon Knight's 'Masks' and in the 1970s, the popular re-emergence of the cyborg is exemplified in Martin Caiden's best-selling novel Cyborg (1972) and Roger Zelazny's short story 'The Engine At Heartspring's Center' (1974). Finally, William Gibson's cyberpunk narratives of the 1980s, such as Neuromancer (1984), and the many cyborg films of the 1980s and early 1990s, such as the RoboCop series (1987 - 1993) continue the list of cyborg narratives that silently assume the human is male, and is therefore gendered masculine.<sup>5</sup>

Often, in these narratives, the human is an elite, or respected member of society, usually a scientist, soldier, or astronaut, who is part of a covert military operation or a space expedition, and has been damaged and impaired in an accident or in a battle and reconstructed into a cyborg. Initially, as a being that is both organic and artificial, the cyborg questions the boundaries that separate humans from machines, rendering human identity problematic by highlighting that the human is a tentative and fragile construct. To give an example from the works

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<sup>5</sup> This list is not exhaustive but reflects a selection of cyborg fiction that explores the augmentation of the impaired human male in science fiction. An example that has emerged recently is James Cameron's film Avatar (2009).

listed above, in Zelazny's short story, 'The Engine At Heartspring's Center', the cyborg is an important politician called Charles Eliot Borkman who is injured in a space accident while saving the lives of others. As a politician and a hero, he is considered worthy of reconstruction. Part metal, plastic and flesh, he is practically immortal removing him from the normal realms of humanity. No longer considering himself human, he decides to end his existence at a euthanasia colony. However, on arriving there he changes his mind because, perversely, the colony, a border region between the living and the dead, is a place where he finds pleasure in his existence as a cyborg.

In this cyborg narrative, Zelazny presents a male subject marginalised and feminised by technology, only for him to prove his humanity and reclaim his masculinity. For instance, 'The Engine at Heartspring's Center' emphasises the cyborg's existential and physical estrangement from humanity. In his new guise as a cyborg, he is merely referred to as 'the Bork' (70). Made of 'flesh' and 'of other things' (71), the Bork is disturbing to those around him. However, despite his unsettling appearance, the Bork is a humanitarian, showing compassion and respect for other people and their right to life. This is proved when he encounters a woman called Nora who has decided that she does not want to die, but desires to live. Nora is desperate to escape the merciless bureaucracy of the euthanasia centre and the Bork intervenes when he 'shorts out' one of the center's 'dispatch machines' saving her from certain death (71). The Bork is a feminised marginal subject but he is also an enigmatic male figure, a lone stranger and a frontier man who is empowered by technology to command authority over his own existence and help others do the same. His humane action is encoded as male and masculine. He is a hero and a gallant protector of women and, as it turns out, a

lover of women too. Nora, appreciating his ability to dispel her assailants, erotically caresses his flesh-metal body, seducing him: 'She ran her hands over his plates, then back and forth from flesh to metal. She pressed her lips against his only cheek that yielded' (74). In the end, it turns out that Nora is from the centre and has come to kill him. She takes her own life and tries to take the life of the Bork by injecting him with a lethal drug. The Bork, however, does not die because his machine parts allow him to exist, while Nora dies in his arms.

'The Engine at Heartspring's Center' is a science fiction text that presents humanity's ambivalent attitude towards technology, revealing a fascination for technology and the machine world and the promise it holds for the human species as well as the fear that it may render the human obsolete. For instance, the merging of human flesh with machinery in Zelazny's text is presented as a problematic image to the western psyche because it breaches the boundaries that define the human as purely organic, self-contained and superior to other forms of life. The cyborg is a reminder that the human body is limited and that humans rely on technology in order to stave off the inevitability of disease, frailty and death that the mortal body entails. In order to ideologically retain the boundaries that constitute the notion of a pure, uncompromised, organic self, western culture repels elements that pollute and disturb human identity. Therefore, the cyborg, a representation of the human compromised by technology, is an identity that is strange and repulsive to the western psyche.

Nonetheless, in Zelazny's narrative, the Bork proves that he is still human by asserting his masculine dominance and control over what is deemed not human, such as technology, women and the mechanistic bureaucracy of Heartspring's Centre. The Bork's body is a composite of organic and machine but his



triumphant relationship with technology finally makes him morally and physically whole and complete. Overall, the cyborg crosses boundaries that normally distinguish humans from every other creature. However, science fiction narratives by male writers often separate out the human from the machine, re-aligning the male protagonist with western philosophical thought on the human as an identity normally belonging to the generic category of Man. It is no coincidence that in the texts mentioned and discussed above, a white male protagonist represents the face of humanity. In science fiction literature, it is often the case that the cyborg, a creature both organic and machine, disrupts human identity, with human identity primarily defined as white, middle-class and male.

### **The Cyborg in Everyday Life**

The cyborg is not just a fictional character in literature. It is also a material entity that exists in the real world. In general, a cyborg identity is understood to emerge when an organism of some description engages with or incorporates some form of technology into their life. The cyborg can be a human whose life has been altered or augmented by a prosthetic of some kind, such as a pace maker or an artificial limb, or by interfacing with communication technologies such as computers (Branwyn 3).<sup>6</sup> As an example of a current cyborg living a cyborgian existence, we may consider the case of American woman Rosemarie Siggins. Rosemarie was born with a rare genetic condition that led her parents to decide

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see Gareth Branwyn's 'The Desire to be Wired' (1993) where he discusses the development and the realities of 'neural-interfacing' and neural prostheses' such as auditory, visual and artificial limb control in relation to science fiction. Additionally, images of inter-dependent relationship between the disabled subject and technology are a regular feature in the media, ranging from amputees that 'wear their [prosthetic] legs openly, [...] customizing them with designs that are flaunted like tattoos' (Navaro 1), to 'Brain chips' that allow paralysed individuals such as Matthew Nagal to 'connect his thoughts and convert them to actions' through computer technology (CNN 1), to augmented athletes such as South African paralympian, Oscar Pistorius, whose 'running legs' challenge notions of disability (Longman 1).

that she should undergo a double full leg amputation. Although Rosemarie's life has been affected by the decisions of those around her, she has also developed a self-determined and independent existence through a physical engagement with technology. Rosemarie is skilled in the field of machinery and technology and is in the first instance an avid car mechanic and car-racing enthusiast. Rosemarie has modified vehicles, enabling her to drive them. In her everyday life, Rosemarie has refused wheelchairs and prosthetic legs and instead prefers to 'walk' by using her hands. However, Rosemarie's favoured prosthetic for moving around the neighbourhood at some speed is a skateboard, a mode of mobility which she has also inventively adapted by replacing the wheels with blades, allowing her to use the local ice rink so that she can teach her young son how to ice skate. Rosemarie does not represent the glamorous fictional world of high-tech possibilities, but she is a woman maintaining a level of independence and control, carving out an identity of her own through the intelligent and practical application of low-tech, hand-tool solutions to machinery that she finds useful and engaging in her everyday life.

Rosemarie, it may be argued, is in some ways similar to Zelazny's human-machine protagonist, the Bork, because she possesses a hybrid cyborg subjectivity that has emerged through a bodily relationship constituted from both animate and inanimate parts. Also, like the Bork, Rosemarie possesses an affinity with technology. In contrast, however, as a woman living with a disability, Rosemarie will never acquire the human masculine traits that encode the male cyborg in Zelazny's text because, in the first instance, Rosemarie's gender excludes her from the humanist Western ideal defining human identity, and in the second, her disabled status indicates that her body remains partial and incomplete, maintained

by an interdependent relationship with technology. However, despite this, whether discussing fact or fiction, high-tech or low-tech scenarios, in addition to how these issues cut across categories such as gender and disability, narratives that tell stories of humans interacting with technology continue to pose questions about what constitutes human identity.

### **The Posthuman and Feminism**

As a result of the increased presence and impact of technology upon the human body, the general consensus is that technology has become so pervasive in our lives that the cyborg is being accepted as a more realistic definition of what it means to be human. Such a definition has given rise to the concept 'posthuman', which rejects the pursuit of an exclusive, perfect and pure human identity, and instead embraces identities that have traditionally, through technology, been branded as marginal, imperfect and 'Other.' For instance, it may be argued that Rosemarie Siggins is a contemporary representation of a posthuman subject and, if this is the case, this means that it is increasingly possible to bring to the centre those narratives usually banished to the periphery of society. The cyborg, then, in addition to being a material entity in both scientific discourse and science fiction, is also a philosophical and theoretical concept about the posthuman subject, reconfiguring previously sanctioned ideas about human identity.

This latest shift in ideas about the human has become attractive to some feminists and has entered feminist theoretical debates. These debates propose strategies to resist patriarchal structures that continue to promote humanist ideals that dominate, exclude and oppress women. In these discussions about the implications of science and technology and how this impacts upon the lives and

bodies of women and those feminised by patriarchal society, Haraway plays a key role. In her cyborg text, she states that 'the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion' (149). Haraway's postmodern stance implies that the cyborg figure is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to separate out from its fictional and factual representations, especially when the cyborg has shifted from the collective imagination into the real world. However, for Haraway, the narrative strands of fact and fiction are of equal importance, because they convey to the reader how discourses concerned with science and technology are neither neutral nor innocent, but are in fact ideologically biased towards the values upheld by western patriarchal society.

Haraway's essay is a rhetorical response to ecofeminists and feminists who have rejected the world of technology and culture as a patriarchal domain from which women have been excluded. For instance, although Haraway does not completely reject their ideas, she cites American radical feminists such as Susan Griffin, Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich as individuals, who 'insist on the organic, opposing it to the technological' (174). For Haraway, a return to some pure notion of nature is an unviable feminist project, particularly when nature is such a highly mediated cultural phenomenon. In short, purist notions of nature and culture form a false dichotomy because nature is always socially constructed, and regardless of whether it is mediated through patriarchal or feminist ideologies, nature will always be interpreted through preferred standpoints and cultural biases. Instead, Haraway's strategy has been to choose a symbol and a material object relevant to expressing the relationship that exists between nature and culture, and that is the cyborg. For Haraway, the cyborg is an ambiguous figure that straddles the realms of the 'natural and crafted,' a figure in tension held together by contradictory and

incompatible parts (149). The cyborg is in this respect an ironic figure by which Haraway can openly declare a non-innocent feminist standpoint for critiquing patriarchy's appropriation of science and technology for its own ends.

Haraway concedes that traditionally within the regime of patriarchy, the cyborg has often promoted technology as a dominating and controlling force over women's bodies. For instance, the cyborg in scientific and science fiction narratives by men often function as a masculine trope, demonstrating Man's mastery over technology and nature. While mastery over technology reassures the male ego, for feminists, mastery over nature represents men wielding power over the feminine and hence women. But Haraway also celebrates the liberating quality that the cyborg figure represents. As she argues, 'The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers after all are inessential' (151). The cyborg, both organic and machine, can also be a troublesome trope, because materially and theoretically, the cyborg undermines and unsettles patriarchy, and patriarchal control by subverting the binary opposites that structure patriarchal thought. The paradox at the centre of the cyborg identity is the transference of humanist values, such as independent action and free will, onto a hybrid figure of human and machine that has been created to serve mankind.

The cyborg's ambiguity is explored in Zelazny's 'The Engine at Heartspring's Center'. The Bork upholds patriarchal values of masculine power and control over technology, but he also represents the anxieties that patriarchy has over this control. The Bork is a human male that relies on machinery to exist.

In patriarchal culture, there is always a fear that men will be disempowered or subsumed by the technology on which they depend. At the end of Zelazny's narrative, when part of the Bork's human body dies, his machine half takes over. As the narrator explains, 'if part of it should die the other pieces need not cease to function, for it could still contrive to carry on the motions the total creature had once performed' (76). The Bork uses technology to transcend the limitations of the flesh representing Man's triumph over nature. Through his actions and his transcendence, the Bork asserts patriarchal authority over the feminine 'Other'. Zelazny's cyborg also unsettles these gendered power relations. If the dead flesh still functions because of technology, does this mean that the Bork is becoming more of a machine than human? If so, then the gender hierarchy of human/machine, animate/inanimate, male/female, masculine/feminine is unstable. Zelazny's text is careful to assert that a part of a human piece lives on affirming Man's domination and control over technology. At the same time, as a cybernetic being, the Bork evokes patriarchal fears about becoming subservient to the technology it has created. For Haraway, the cyborg is a material and fictional figure that performs a constructive and deconstructive narrative function, shoring up human identity, only to question and render human identity problematic. It is this subversive aspect of the cyborg that Haraway finds attractive and potentially useful to feminism. As Haraway argues, the cyborg 'reveals both dominations and possibilities' (154).

### **Feminist Criticism of Haraway's Cyborg Theory**

Haraway's Cyborg Theory has received a range of criticisms from within feminism. Sandra Harding, who is interested in how power, knowledge, and

language function in scientific discourse, warns in The Science Question in Feminism (1986) that Haraway's approach to technology is in danger of creating and perpetuating new systems of domination. For example, in Harding's view, Haraway maintains a feminist epistemological standpoint that is contained within a Marxist framework. As Harding states, 'This can be seen in her not so hidden assumptions that we can indeed, tell "one true story" (194). For Harding, Haraway's cyborg theory is limited because it proposes that it is only those most marginalised who truly understand oppression, that are the most qualified to resolve such a difficult issue (26, 194). Material feminist Teresa Ebert is concerned that Haraway's Cyborg Theory is a narrative that functions primarily in favour of bourgeois individualism, seeing the cyborg as the embodiment of a white middle-class woman's desire for female agency (Ebert 34). She argues that in order to overcome the theoretical impasse of social constructionism and structuralist technological determinism in discourse and language, postmodern feminists have re-theorised a feminist mode of textual and inter-textual agency, allowing the reader and author to playfully interact through the text, building alliances and reinventing new meanings. According to Ebert, the cyborg is a discursive monadic structure re-inscribing the autonomous liberal self, a self that Haraway was supposed to deconstruct because it is this entrepreneurial figure of the individual that underpins Western patriarchal capitalism (Ebert 34). Further, Lucie Armitt criticises Haraway for abandoning and de-valuing the body of the mother, and hence nature, in favour of the masculine world of technology and culture (Armitt, Theorising the Fantastic 78). In a comparative reading between Haraway and feminist theorist Julia Kristeva, Armitt questions the liberating possibilities of Haraway's cyborg figure, because being assimilated by technology,

which she considers Haraway's work suggests, means that there may be 'no longer a self present to do the feeling' (80). Overall, Armitt questions whether Haraway goes too far in promoting the technological body, contrasting her work with feminist theorists who have celebrated the power of the female body. These criticisms are pertinent and valuable contributions to the ongoing debate about the relationship between women, science and technology in contemporary society. They are examples of how Haraway's Cyborg Theory has been interpreted within feminism.

In response to these criticisms, I want to propose that Haraway is not creating another system of domination, eliding differences by prioritising any one vantage point over another, nor is she de-valuing the feminine in patriarchal culture. However, it may be said that Haraway is expressing a desire for female agency, although I would argue that this is not through some form of unmitigated pursuit of the individual over collective concerns. Haraway's cyborg is a far more pragmatic figure in its approach and goals. For example, despite Sandra Harding's initial misgivings about Haraway's cyborg theory, she also concedes that postmodern feminist approaches to science, such as Haraway's, are the best to date in promoting a feminist vision for the future (194-195). Harding identifies a tension between Haraway's utopian vision and the practicalities for implementing it. Nonetheless, she considers that it is a vision, which feminists 'cannot afford to give up' (195). The cyborg is a utopian figure that hovers between fantasy and reality, but it is an ideal that has practical implications. For instance, in Bodies in Technology (2002), Don Ihde claims that because the cyborg revels in its artificiality, simulation and fantasy, it is a more open and honest figure (83). Therefore, in Ihde's interpretation, the cyborg is an important metaphor that has



helped redefine science as a non-innocent and value-laden institution. As Ihde explains, this means that rather than reading science as ‘a utopian expansion of a unified knowledge, or a value-neutral [...] activity’, it is instead understood to be ‘more pragmatic, finite and limited, and socially-culturally constituted, even up to and including possible deep gender biases and Eurocentric features’ (51). As I have already stated, Haraway’s cyborg is both a material and theoretical entity and is primarily defined by its hybrid status. Constituted from different and opposing components, for example, the two elements human and machine, the cyborg, in Haraway’s theoretical narrative, is always a composite of conjoined opposites, which although contradictory, together have the potential to generate and create new meanings. This does not mean the cyborg can generate any meaning, because that meaning is constrained by particular historical situations. In Haraway’s interpretation, the cyborg is a rhetorical figure, prompting women and feminists to rethink their relationship with technology, in order to imagine and generate new technological possibilities conducive to feminist concerns.

Ultimately, Haraway’s proposal for a cyborg identity is a strategy for women to build alliances between women (Haraway 150). It is not about creating new systems of domination and it is not about promoting individual interests over collective goals. Haraway recognises that when the category of ‘woman’ is used to voice women’s concerns, the cultural differences between women are often forgotten. In contrast, the openly constructed hybrid identity of the cyborg is for Haraway, first of all, a reminder to women of the cultural differences that exist between them and, secondly, how these cultural differences de-naturalise the universal category of ‘woman’ (155). Haraway is not against nature, nor against the feminine that is associated with nature, but she is instead keen to highlight that

nature is a social construct de-valued by patriarchy in order to justify domination and control over it. This means that if nature and the feminine are social constructs, then so is culture and the masculine - neither rest in a natural hierarchical state. In this respect, the cyborg is a way to understand, critique and think of new strategies to subvert these artificial dualisms that pervade patriarchal language. Through the figure of the cyborg, Haraway aims to re-align the feminine, and empower the feminine through culture and technology, and to subvert gender hierarchies that have been created and used to justify the domination of those marked as feminine, inferior and 'Other.'

To sum up at this point and to expand this argument further; rather than demonising capitalist social relations and its technology, Haraway highlights, through the figure of the cyborg, the contradiction that lies at the heart of western society, that despite the oppressive practices of patriarchal regimes, patriarchal capitalism also generates the potential for developing practices that are oppositional and promise liberation. It is within this context that I propose Haraway's cyborg theory represents individuals who are socially constrained by patriarchal society, but who also desire to break free. It is through the figure of the cyborg that these tensions are expressed, and in science fiction literature there is a strand of women's writing which explores this theme through the narrative of the physically impaired female, technologically adapted into a cyborg. In this respect, women's science fiction anticipates and reflects the issues and concerns that Haraway's Cyborg Theory raises. Haraway's cyborg text, however, is not exclusively about women, but is also about the increasingly feminised and marginalised status of men in contemporary Western society. Therefore, my analysis of the cyborg in science fiction literature will include women writers who

have used the representation of the marginalised figure of the physically impaired male cyborg, which has allowed them to re-explore and examine the relationship between women and men, when masculinity is in crisis. Before I introduce the range of texts this thesis proposes to examine, I will explain the relationship between Haraway's feminist cyborg theory and disability studies.

### **Haraway, the Cyborg, Gender and Disability**

So far I have explained that the cyborg is a construct both organic and machine and that within patriarchal discourse the cyborg is a marginal hybrid figure that deviates from the male 'norm.' At the same time, the cyborg unsettles categories that define human identity. It is from this premise that Haraway looks to the hybrid identity of the cyborg in order to build a collective alliance between individual subjects who, because of physical difference, have culturally become marginalised as 'Other' in Western patriarchal society. In her 'Cyborg Manifesto', Haraway suggestively promotes a material and discursive alliance between disabled and non-disabled subjects through the empowering image of the cyborg (173-178). Haraway achieves this by drawing upon the field of cybernetic studies, which argues that 'cybernetic systems are constituted by flows of information' and, therefore, 'subjectivity is not necessarily defined by the boundary of the epidermal surface' (Hayles 84). For instance, in her discussion of cyborg writing, Haraway argues that 'Writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs', establishing a relationship between women, technology and writing (176), offering an image of technologically enhanced women, extending the self beyond the body into the world of discourse. As Haraway argues, 'Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the

basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other' (175). The cyborg figure as the interaction between mind/body/writing-tool, promotes a new kind of subjectivity - a cybernetic subjectivity that emphasises the liminality of the material and textual body, disrupting the boundaries that define human identity. The image of the cyborg as a figure marginalised by technology, but also communicatively empowered by technology leads Haraway to draw a comparison between women and the disabled subject, tentatively concluding that: 'Perhaps paraplegics and other severely handicapped people can (and sometimes do) have the most intense experiences of complex hybridization with other communication devices' (178). Here Haraway is promoting a human/machine alliance as a positive image that not only enables those most marginalised in western society, but also presents them as a disrupting force, encouraging individuals, particularly women, to engage with technology in order to collectively intervene in and alter socially constructed representations that are damaging to those marginalised by patriarchal society. Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' places herself and feminism in an ambitious position, suggesting through the figure of the cyborg, a greater level of social inclusion for marginalised subjects.

Historically, feminism and disability studies have shared an uneasy alliance because feminist discourses often elide issues pertinent to those living with disability, rendering the disabled subject invisible. In recent years, feminist scholars working within disability studies have tried to address this problem by shifting the focus from the politics of identity to the politics of difference. The aim has been to understand how cultural institutions oppressively generate, and maintain, as well as subversively use difference within, and between disabled and non-disabled subjectivities. A text that explores these issues is Barbara Fawcett's

book Feminist Perspectives on Disability (2000). Fawcett focuses upon a common element that concerns both women and the disabled subject, which is the body. She merges feminist theory with disability studies, developing the terms 'able-bodiedness' and 'disabled- bodiedness' in order to conceptualise how representations of gender and disability intersect and emerge in western culture through bodies both feminine and feminised by society (Fawcett 114-115). Fawcett draws upon a variety of theorists, whose work has been used to develop postmodern ideas about the body. For example, Michel Foucault and feminist Elizabeth Grosz are two cultural theorists that Fawcett looks to in order to provide a useful and flexible framework for examining oppressive cultural representations of women and the disabled subject, as well as providing the oppressed subject a voice with which to reply.

Although Fawcett's theoretical language is strikingly similar to that of Haraway's, particularly in relation to her theme of building coalitions across difference, her work does not acknowledge Haraway's cyborg theory. In fact, with the exception of cultural and literary theorist Rosemarie Garland Thomson, there are few who have looked to the benefits that Haraway's cyborg figure can offer. This suggests that within the field of cultural and literary theory, Haraway's cyborg theory has either been dismissed, or has largely been overlooked in developing feminist perspectives on disability. In relation to the research I have conducted on science fiction literature, I have yet to find any critical work that examines the meanings of gender and disability when generated through the cyborg figure. However, it has to be stated that Haraway's suggestion for developing a more inclusive feminist theory in order to build alliances through difference, especially in terms of gender and disability is exactly that, - a

suggestion, which needs further development. It is therefore useful to turn to the writing of Rosemarie Garland Thomson to consider the material and ideological associations that she builds across the categories of gender and disability, in order to understand how they are linked through the figure of the cyborg.

In her book Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability In American Culture and Literature (1997), Garland Thomson discusses the historical emergence of ideas that began to associate the female body with the disabled body:

Perhaps the founding association of femaleness with disability occurs in the fourth book of *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle's discourse of the normal and the abnormal, in which he refines the Platonic concept of antinomies so that bodily variety translates into hierarchies of the typical and the aberrant. (19)

As Garland Thomson notes, the female and disabled body shift from Platonic notions of bodily variation to become, in Aristotle's work, bodies that are physically, socially and metaphorically incomplete, impaired and inferior. This understanding of bodily difference took hold in the modern era, when the concept of the 'norm' emerged during the eighteenth century (Garland Thomson 114). Therefore, as she explains, bodies that were once considered 'distinctive,' 'prodigious,' or 'monstrous,' were re-characterised through 'the normal/abnormal dichotomy' as pathological (114). However, for Garland Thomson, within the

cultural context of postmodernism, the cyborg has emerged as a new version of the grotesque, allowing the anomalous body to define itself on its own positive terms (114).

To explain, in modern discourse the grotesque became a socially constructed figure that either breached the boundaries of what is often termed 'the norm' or was incomplete. In a cultural postmodern climate when unity is no longer considered an 'organising principle,' the grotesque, according to Garland Thomson 'sheds its twisted, repugnant, and despair laden implications and becomes a cyborg' (114-115). However, Garland Thomson is careful to differentiate between the materiality of the able-bodied female with that of the disabled subject when formulating her theory about the cyborg: 'Whereas the notion of a hybrid self might act as a guiding metaphor for those who consider themselves non-disabled, for people with disabilities such hybridization is often consonant with actual experience. The disabled person always fuses the physically typical with the physically atypical' (114). For instance, Rosemarie Siggins and her bodily collaboration with prosthetic devices such as her modified skateboards and motor vehicles represents, I would argue, a hybrid identity of the typical and the atypical, the typical being her organic body merged with the atypical, a prosthetic. In short, what Garland Thomson is arguing, and this concurs with Haraway's outlook, is that the female and disabled body defies the concept of unity that underpins modern discourses, and this in turn imposes a hierarchy of value through bodily difference. As a postmodern and posthuman identity, the female and disabled body, through the collaborative figure of the cyborg, possess the potential to generate new meanings, thus rendering problematic Western notions of human identity.

Despite Garland Thomson's utilisation of Haraway's cyborg in her investigation into the representation of disability in nineteenth and twentieth century American literature, there are some scholars working in the field of disability studies who find Haraway's cyborg figure an overly optimistic and ableist myth. Tobin Siebers, for instance, in his essay 'Disability in Theory: From Social Constructionism to the New Realism of the Body' states: 'Haraway is so preoccupied with power and ability that she forgets what disability is. Prostheses always increase the cyborg's abilities; they are a source of new powers, never of problems. The cyborg is always more than human – and never risks to be seen as being subhuman. To put it simply, the cyborg is not disabled' (178).

Siebers is correct to point out Haraway's optimistic outlook in her writing. However, Haraway's cyborg text is about critiquing the human as it is defined within western philosophy building alliances between those who possess bodies that are deemed both more and less than human, but never accepted as being fully human. This, as I have argued includes both able bodied and the non-able bodied subjects, such as women and those living with disability. The cyborg is both a problematic and promising figure, and for Haraway a risky figure because the cyborg never quite sheds its patriarchal origins and the humanist values that have brought it into being. At the same time, the cyborg also has the potential to move beyond these values, creating an inclusive alternative model to humanism's whole and pure organic subject, primarily understood to be exclusively white, middle class, able-bodied and male. Haraway's cyborg is always partial and incomplete, and is a feminist re-appropriation of those subjects marginalised and excluded by patriarchal discourse due to difference. For Haraway, the perfect human male body is a myth that no one can achieve, while the cyborg represents the reality of



an everyday bodily existence, experienced by a feminised majority. As disabled performing artist Ju Gosling states, '[Haraway] argues for a coalition based on 'affinity, not identity'. Unlike pluralism, where groups coalesce despite their differences to unite around a common aim, affinity would mean that groups coalesced because they recognised both their commonalities and each Other's sources of and manifestations of oppression' (Gosling, 'Pride' 4).

While Siebers rejects Haraway's post-human proposal for developing a cyborg subjectivity, Ju Gosling finds the cyborg an empowering image and integrates cyborg philosophy into her everyday life. On her website, 'My Not So Secret Life As A Cyborg' (1997), Gosling explains, through a sequence of web pages, how she is transformed into a cyborg. For instance, when Gosling develops a life long debilitating condition, she has to wear a body brace, which threatens to redefine her identity. As Gosling explains, 'My androgynous image had vanished; instead the brace/borg exaggerated my femininity and impairment whilst conflating the two' (Gosling, 'The Brace/Borg' 1). In response, Gosling decides that 'The only answer was to reassert my ownership, to assimilate the brace within myself rather than continuing to be assimilated by it' (Gosling, 'The Brace/Borg' 2). In her quest to reclaim her identity as an androgynous subject, Gosling draws inspiration from and immerses herself into what she terms 'the cyborg/body debate', by critically engaging with this discursive field from the perspective of disability (Gosling, 'From Borg to Cyborg' 1). As Gosling states:

I felt that the cyborg, an artificial human who  
is partially inorganic, was a useful visual metaphor  
to use, both in terms of popular culture and in

terms of the academic cyborg debate which is currently so popular in studies ranging from art to communication to the body. I also wanted to locate myself as a disabled woman within those discourses, because the disabled body is currently absent from them, whereas if it were included, many of these discourses would be problematised. (Gosling, 'From Borg to Cyborg' 3)

It is clear from her website and her work that Gosling regards herself as an individual who embodies a cyborg identity, celebrating the positives that technology brings to her life. She states, 'travelling in cyberspace literally allows me to detach myself from my body, since the concentration involved diminishes my awareness of pain' (Gosling, 'From Borg to Cyborg' 2). However, Gosling also remains realistic about the negative outcomes that a cyborg life entails, particularly in relation to her experience of enduring an extremely painful life long condition and, therefore, having an intimate understanding of the limitations of technology (Gosling, 'From Borg to Cyborg' 3). Unlike Siebers, who claims that cyborgs are not disabled, in Gosling's view the cyborg exemplifies the constraints of a lived material body:

[...]the idea that, in the new millennium, we will be augmented and upgraded by technology would be undermined by the realisation that scientists can't produce an artificial hip joint

which will reliably last longer than ten years,  
and indeed, that the body is so resistant to being  
“upgraded” that people who have had transplants  
need to take drugs for the rest of their lives to prevent  
rejection. (Gosling, ‘From Borg to Cyborg’ 3)

Siebers’s and Gosling’s differing accounts of Haraway’s cyborg text lay the ground for the theme I propose in this thesis, which is the generative and interpretative possibilities of the cyborg figure, both oppressive and liberating. It is through the ambiguous and contradictory position that the cyborg occupies that I wish to critically analyse the work of American women science fiction writers who have utilized the representation of gender and disability in their cyborg texts as they attempt to expose and subvert the social biases that permeate science fiction literature in Western patriarchal society.

### **The Cyborg in Women’s Science Fiction**

American science fiction is a male-dominate genre that was established in 1926 by a male network of editors, publishers, writers and readers with the launch of Hugo Gernsback’s pulp magazine Amazing Stories (Attebery 39). Writing primarily for a male readership, stories in science fiction pulp magazines reflected the male point of view and naturalised men’s affinity with science and technology. As Brian Attebery explains, ‘Within a decade of Gernsback’s first issue, editors, fans and writers had reached consensus as to what type of story reflected the role science was to play in framing the future and dramatized the role of the scientifically-minded individual in bringing about social progress’ (40). Although

‘the scientifically- minded individual’ was assumed male (40), women were also involved in the science fiction community as writers, readers and fans (Bacon-Smith 95-96).<sup>7</sup> Compared to men, women held a marginal position in science fiction culture. However, their presence also meant that women acquired a familiarity with science fiction concepts that emerged throughout the twentieth century. Many of the writers and critics I discuss in this thesis represent a tradition and history of women in science fiction.

In Robin Roberts’s book A New Species: Gender and Science in Science in Science Fiction (1993), writer and science fiction fan Andrea Lorraine Fuller makes the following comment about American science fiction literature:

I’ve been reading science fiction since the  
mid- 1940s. I read the stories for the beginnings  
– men may have been reading them for the  
endings. I was looking for strong, capable  
women and science fiction was the only place  
I could find such women. I think [other] women  
writers and I want to rewrite the endings. (45)

In the context of Robert’s book, Fuller is discussing the mass produced pulp science fiction of the 1940s and 1950s that revered and feared the reproductive power of women through the portrayal of the female alien. In general, these narratives began with women as enlarged beings, whose grotesque bodies

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<sup>7</sup> Camille Bacon-Smith explains that men and women were drawn to science fiction in the late 20s and 30s. This was, in part, due to the impact of the Great Depression on the lives of the middle-classes who ‘found in the fiction a hope for a brighter future through technology’ (Bacon-Smith 96).

diminished and threatened the masculinity of the male protagonist.

Conventionally, the female alien is associated with women's biology and the male protagonist with patriarchal culture and technology. In the final instance, the male protagonist demonstrates his technological capabilities and masculine superiority over the feminine 'Other' by either controlling her power, or by rendering her inferior, incapable and weak. Overall, women and men are reduced to gender stereotypes that assert patriarchal authority over the female subject (Roberts, A New Species 41-46). However, Fuller looks beyond the stereotypes and conventions of science fiction, finding qualities in the genre that are exciting and empowering to women because they also offer images of feminine strength (Roberts 45). Nonetheless, as she states, the intention is not just to read through the stereotypes and conventions of science fiction but to intervene in them, effecting change by highlighting the causes that are of interest to women and feminism.

Fuller's faith in science fiction and its potential usefulness to women reflect the positive attitude that women writers have towards the genre: a growing trend that has benefited both women and a field of literature traditionally dominated by men. For instance, in Where No Man Has Gone Before (1991) Lucie Armitt identifies that, 'the emergence of women's SF [...] has played a large role in broadening out the readership of SF beyond the specialist clique to the more general reader interested in women's writing and issues' (2). Women writers are attracted to the genre because, despite the sanctioning of conservative values that divide men and women into their preferred gendered roles, science fiction is also about the encounter with difference, demonstrating what Adam Roberts describes as 'a fundamental *hospitality to otherness*' (148).

Difference is that which is alien and ‘Other’ to the human, such as the cyborg, a marginal figure that women can identify with. In science fiction literature, the cyborg often emerges as a gendered stereotype representing the social relations that exist between women and men. Usually, this means that the cyborg conforms to patriarchal expectations and desires that view men and women in their traditional masculine and feminine roles. However, as Jane Donawerth argues, women’s science fiction plays with gender stereotypes in order to confront and transform them (107-108). This is an observation that Sarah Lefanu makes and is equally excited about in her book In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction (1988), claiming how recent changes have ‘allowed’ writers to experiment with ‘the separation of social role from gender’ (20). This critical analysis of stereotypes in science fiction literature and the disruption of conventional social roles is important for engaging in a dialogue with critics who have questioned the cyborg in women’s writing as a reification of gender and disability stereotypes.

In my analysis of science fiction representations of the cyborg, I will discuss the way women writers have intervened into the male dominated world of American science fiction. Keeping in mind Fuller’s personal experience of science fiction texts, my intention is to retain the spirit of her statement, explaining how women writers have appropriated traditional science fiction tropes and stereotypes for their own ends. As I have discussed, I am interested in a strand of literature that speculates on the technological possibility of reconstructing the impaired subject as a cyborg: a feature of American science fiction that emerged during the closing stages of World War II. American women writers have approached this subject in ways that differ significantly to cyborg texts produced

by men. In narratives written by men, the cyborg has served to maintain the authority of masculinity over the feminine, shoring up patriarchal values that promote the domination of men over women. For instance, in Zelazny's text 'The Engine at Heartspring's Center', the cyborg promotes values that assert the superiority of the human male over the feminine 'Other', maintaining gender hierarchies that are conducive to patriarchal culture.

In contrast, the texts that I will look at written by women utilise the reconstructed figure of the cyborg to destabilise and question the gendered social order, and do so in ways that are pertinent to their moment of production and publication. In this context, the intersection of disability with gender through the cyborg figure offers a critical edge that has to date either been rejected or overlooked. For example, Jane Donawerth argues that the presence of disability in women's science fiction narratives about women-as-machine 'literatize the inferiority attributed to women' (61). Ultimately, for Donawerth, 'The portraits of women-as-machines remain ambiguous at best' (67). Therefore, according to Donawerth, women's texts that intersect gender and disability through the cyborg figure offer little that is positive to the female reader about women's engagement with technology.

In contrast, I read the potential of disability for deconstructing gender and human identity as an important subversive category. For example, in the narratives I discuss, the impaired subject reconstructed by technology creates a cyborg figure that mimics or performs gender. The cyborg's performance of gender is both convincing and subversive confusing the boundaries that define the human. The cyborg's potential to destabilise gender dichotomies in western

culture links Haraway's cyborg theory with queer theory.<sup>8</sup> Queer theory emerged in the early 1990s with Judith Butler's book Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990). Butler's theory on gender performance argues that gender is not so much what one is but, rather, it is what one does. Gender is not an essential element of an individual's identity but rather is learnt through the repetition of acts that are perceived by the dominant culture to construe a particular coherent gender identity. However, as Butler states: 'The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities, [...] in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender' (12). What Butler means is that gender is an artificial construct that elides the instability of identity in western culture. According to Butler, gender identity is always open to intentional and unintentional subversions and alternate possibilities. In her cyborg theory, Haraway emphasises that the human and gender are unstable categories that are subject to change. In this thesis, I demonstrate that the cyborg in women's writing progressively emerges as a queer figure, reflecting the development and acceptance of feminist and queer discourses of gender, sexuality and the human in mainstream culture.

To sum up at this point, modern western thought has constructed impairment as a negative feature of the human, devaluing both body and mind. Through the postmodern figure of the cyborg, impairment acquires positive values, providing women writers with a critical tool in which to explore gender oppression within patriarchal society. Impairment informs feminism about the way gender is used to bear the negative values of society, while disrupting ableist

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Veronica Hollinger and Wendy Pearson are key advocates of queer theory in science fiction. Of note is Veronica Hollinger's '(Re)reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, and the Defamiliarization of Gender' (2002).



myths about the disabled subject, perpetuated by patriarchal culture. Serving as a metaphor for women and men disempowered by society, impairment helps to illuminate the material constraints imposed upon them. In this context, the cyborg, representing the impaired, gendered subject, is important in ways that have so far received little attention in literary studies. In the chapters to follow, the aim is to demonstrate how the cyborg subverts stereotypes that underpin the social conventions defining gender and disability, as I discuss the significance of the cyborg in women's writing within their particular historical moments.

### **Outline of Themes and Chapters**

The texts I explore are placed in chronological order and are divided into three sections. Each section will consist of two chapters and in each chapter I will offer a reading of my selected cyborg narrative. There are common elements and themes that overlap and link the sections together, such as the allusion of the cyborg figure to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), the association of the cyborg with the military and space travel, the trope of the mechanical woman enslaved by male desires, and men-machines as alternative feminist ideals to the human male. However, each chapter will also remain distinct, informed by the text's historical, social and literary contexts, and by the way authors have treated the subject of gender and disability through the cyborg figure. While situating each set of texts respectively within their socio-historical context and political framework of proto-feminism, second wave feminism and postmodern feminism, my reading remains informed by Haraway's cyborg theory.

Section One is titled Female Cyborgs: Frontier Women. In this section I argue that the cyborg texts under scrutiny convey a pioneering spirit. Proto-

feminist ideas about gender and disability are evident in these texts, reflecting the optimistic outlook of Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto'. There are limitations imposed upon the female cyborgs in the texts chosen for discussion. Nonetheless, they represent women engaging positively with technology. As women augmented by technology, they are cyborgs that become part of a discourse, as described by Anne Hudson, on 'participant evolution', whereby they are transformed into an archetypal model of techno-woman that is potentially progressive and liberating.

In Chapter One, I start with C.L. Moore's classic short story 'No Woman Born' (1944). 'No Woman Born' has received some critical attention, but no one as yet has looked at this story from the perspective of gender and disability, and the implications of this representation of woman in relation to the closing stages of World War II. In general, critics have acknowledged the disruptive potential of Moore's cyborg in terms of the gendered body. However, the significance of disability as a positive generative value threatening the stability of gender identity as it is constructed within patriarchal society has been missed. The aim of this chapter is to examine how Moore uses gender and disability in order to bring together the feminine and the grotesque, through the figure of the cyborg, in a subversive critique of male desire for the domination and control of the female body.

In Moore's narrative, her female protagonist, Deidre, is disfigured in a fire with only her brain left undamaged. Deidre is saved when her brain is refitted into a prosthetic body. However, the merging of the feminine with the technological body is, in the eyes of Deidre's male counterparts, a disturbing and unnatural phenomenon that needs to be overcome and controlled. Throughout the narrative,

a technologically empowered Deidre struggles to convince the men in her life of her ability and desire to control her own existence. As a cyborg, Deidre acknowledges the limitations imposed upon her, because of her 'Otherness', but refuses to be subsumed within the conventional role of a female subordinated to the desires of the human male. Deidre's damaged and reconstructed body disrupts gender conventions that define her role as a woman in western society. As a new and unique being, she is no longer human. Instead, her woman-machine status disrupts and questions human identity. Deidre is a female cyborg that is ahead of her time, proposing a model of femininity that rejects and surpasses the boundaries and constraints imposed upon women by patriarchy at the end of World War II.

In the second chapter, I will look at the popular narratives written during the 1960s by Anne McCaffrey, collectively published in 1969 under the title The Ship Who Sang. In this 'Brainship Series', the reader follows the adventures of a physically impaired female called Helva, who is adapted to control and pilot a spaceship. Again, although this particular series has received critical attention from within the separate spheres of gender and disability, no one, as yet, has analysed Helva's character from both perspectives simultaneously. A main concern is that McCaffrey's cyborg protagonist reaffirms gender and disability stereotypes. As a physically impaired female, it has been argued that Helva is a sentimental representation of an inferior helpmate to a series of able-bodied male partners who accompany her on a series of missions and adventures.

The aim of this chapter is to address these concerns by offering an alternative reading of McCaffrey's 'Brainship' narratives within the context of the 1960s, during the Cold War space race, when the search for the ideal astronaut intersected with issues of gender, and coincided with the radicalization of the

American housewife. In this context, Helva, a female cyborg fit for space travel, reflects the controversial evidence provided by privately funded space projects that proposed women, rather than men, were mentally and physically better suited to withstand the rigours of space travel. I argue that McCaffrey's cyborg texts are informed by this discourse as I explore the subversive potential of Helva's technologically altered female and physically impaired body. Overall, McCaffrey constructs a female protagonist out of what at first appears to be conventional gendered and disabled stereotypes, but questions these stereotypes by placing her in the unconventional role of adventurer and space traveler.

Section Two is titled Cynical Cyborgs: Shifting (A)Genders, reflecting the changing attitude of women writers towards the cyborg figure during the 1970s and their response to the popular representations of the cyborg that re-emerged in men's writing at this time, such as Ira Levin's novel The Stepford Wives (1972) and Martin Caidin's Cyborg (1972). The Stepford Wives is a disturbing narrative about the replacement of real women with obedient mechanical replicas, while Cyborg witnesses the reconstruction of crash victim Steve Austin into an invincible secret agent. The assimilation and subordination of women in order to restore the dominance of men and masculinity in these two texts highlight how technology is used to re-establish and stabilize the gendered social order in this period.

In the cyborg texts by women chosen for discussion, the central theme is love and romance as the focus shifts to questioning gender relations rather than reaffirming them. In this context, the cyborg emerges in two forms: firstly, it is a figure that begins to question the divisions that exist between women and how women perpetuate their own oppression, and secondly, it is a figure that explores

the implications of shifting gender power relations between women and men and the desire to transform gender identity. Gender and disability are identities that are used to explore these themes as I demonstrate how women's writing that features the cyborg not only anticipates Haraway's cyborg theory, but also engages directly with Shulameth Firestone's influential feminist text The Dialectic of Sex (1971) as they explore the transformative possibilities of technology for women argued for by Firestone in this work.

In Chapter Three, I look at James Tiptree, Jr.'s (Alice B. Sheldon) classic short story 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1973). Tiptree's story is a proto-cyberpunk narrative about a young physically deformed woman called P. Burke, who is taken from the streets and used to remotely control the beautiful but artificially grown body of a young woman named Delphi. 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' is set in the near future, where advertising has been outlawed as an illegal practice and corporate companies have resorted to manufacturing desires through remotely controlled celebrity figures such as Delphi. In this tale of beauty and the beast, deformity and perfection are central themes that demarcate the physical differences that not only exist between women, but which society also constructs between women, thus dividing them. I argue that 'The Girl Who...' alludes to Shulameth Firestone's analysis of the culture of romance as it is defined within patriarchy, discussing how women are relentlessly informed by new media technologies as they become 'plugged into the same circuit' (Firestone 174). Entrapped within a technologically male dominated system from which there is no escape, Firestone argues that women frantically compete with one another in pursuit of the latest beauty ideal. I consider that Tiptree's narrative exemplifies Firestone's argument about women and technology, serving as a critique of how

women are coerced by oppressive ideologies through technology, as her main protagonist P. Burke, in her cyborg guise, colludes in her own oppression in this future dystopian narrative.

In Chapter Four, the focus shifts to the male cyborg as I look at Joan D. Vinge's romantic narrative 'Tin Soldier' (1974). 'Tin Soldier' is about an elite 'spacer woman' called Brandy who falls in love with Maris, a man who is physically impaired in war and reconstructed as a cyborg. As a cyborg, Maris is inferior to both 'spacer women' and men. Therefore, Brandy's sexual liaisons with Maris transgress the laws of 'spacer' culture. It is only when Brandy is damaged in a fire and transformed into a cyborg like Maris that they become equal in love. Sarah Lefanu has dismissed Vinge's narrative as a problematic text because, ultimately, it ends with 'a crippled cyborg' (Lefanu 78). 'Perhaps', as Lefanu argues, 'the problem lies in the object of the search: Romantic love' (78)

However, Lefanu misses the significance of the 'crippled cyborg' in Vinge's text. I consider that 'Tin Soldier' is a response to Shulameth Firestone's critique of love outlined in The Dialectic of Sex (1970). Vinge's cyborg narrative is an oppositional text to the emergence of works by male authors, such as Martin Caiden's novel Cyborg that portrays the reconstruction of a male amputee into a technologically enhanced male cyborg whose masculinity is affirmed by his desirability to women. In contrast to Caiden's novel, I read the male cyborg in Vinge's text as a figure that is physically and socially feminised, serving as a comment upon women's existence in patriarchal society. Vinge's portrayal of the cyborg figure anticipates Haraway's affirmation that 'The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world' (Haraway 150). Through the cyborg, she explores the

relationship between love and social inequality and produces a narrative that seeks to transcend this inequality.

Vinge's narrative not only reflects the problems associated with gender identity within patriarchal society, but also it speculates on the challenges women will face when they acquire power. It is within this context that Vinge's text can be read as a narrative that thoughtfully explores how shifting power relations favouring women could not only create new but also re-create old forms of bigotry, prejudice and double standards. At the same time, Vinge's physically damaged cyborg soldier alludes to the image of the disabled Vietnam War veteran that emerged in American literary culture during the 1970s. I explore the implications of this allusion, particularly in relation to contemporary narratives that work to restore the masculine status of the disabled Vietnam War veteran at a moment when feminism was poised to emerge as a political force.

Finally, Section Three is titled Cyborgs in Crisis: Men in Decline, reflecting the socio-historical context of the late twentieth century and the fascination with masculinity as a crisis-ridden identity in literary and popular culture. At a moment when American men were viewed as a species in crisis - a consequence of North America's economic decline and rapid global technological change - the cyborg emerged as a technologically enhanced male transformed into an invincible fighting machine: an image that is exemplified in the Terminator and RoboCop films. The hyper-masculine and violent figure of the cyborg in these films, and the many that would follow,<sup>9</sup> served to mask the reality of the emasculated male subject of the 1980s and 1990s, aligning him instead with

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, Daniel Dinello in Technophobia! (2005) cites Hardware (Stanley, 1990), Cyborg Soldier (Firstenberg, 1993), and American Cyborg (Davidson 1994) as the 'copy-cyborg' films of the 1990s (Dinello 136).

America's global image as a leading military force. In contrast, evoking Haraway's assertion that economic and technological change has feminised the contemporary male, I discuss the significance of gender, disability and the male cyborg figure in women's science fiction, arguing that their work offers an alternative vision of contemporary masculinity in a shifting and unstable postmodern era.

In Chapter Five, I look at Lois McMaster Bujold's unconventional Space Opera hero and protagonist, Miles Vorkosigan, in her novel The Warrior's Apprentice (1986). Miles is of noble status and desires to follow his ancestors into military service. However, he is born physically impaired, which compromises his masculinity, marginalising him in a male dominated military culture. In Bujold's novel, Miles's privileged status as nobleman is constantly undercut by his physical limitations. In my discussion of Miles, I argue that he is a cyborg, as defined by Haraway in her 'Cyborg Manifesto'. I propose that Miles's relationship with technology is cyclic, with technology disabling, enabling and disabling him again, but never offering him a stable masculine identity. Finally, I argue that Miles's unstable masculine identity is a critique of traditional representations of the space opera hero. Based on this interpretation, I offer a reading of Miles as a hybrid figure who embodies two conflicting identities: both an elite aristocratic nobleman and a disabled subject. I claim that Miles is representative of Reagan's America and the collective desire to recover and restore America's lost masculinity. Through this critical lens, I explain how Miles Vorkosigan is a character that conforms to and undermines the American myth of masculinity, indicating the elusive nature of masculinity as an identity impossible to achieve.



In the final chapter, the focus shifts from physical impairment to cognitive impairment, as I look at Marge Piercy's cyborg novel He, She and It (1991), arguing that it is a feminist text which alludes to masculinity as a form of autism. Literary critic Berthold Schoene explains that in recent years, autism has emerged as a medical, cultural and literary phenomenon that has associated masculinity with the negative pathological traits of this disability. I argue that Piercy's novel reflects this cultural association. I demonstrate my claim by discussing the male cyborg Yod. Yod is built as a killing machine. Although perfect, Yod is like the autistic subject - he is socially and emotionally impaired and unable to empathise with humans. However, through female intervention, Yod is transformed from perfect weapon to perfect lover, shedding his negative masculine traits in the acquisition of a positive feminine identity. Piercy has acknowledged He, She and It is a text that is in dialogue with Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto'. However, my approach shows how Piercy's text diverges from Haraway's cyborg theory as much as it draws upon it. For instance, Piercy explores the subversive and liberating possibilities of the cyborg for women and men, while also critically evaluating Haraway's cyborg politics of difference and its limitations. Overall, the central point of my argument is that through the figure of the male cyborg, Piercy's novel debunks and rejects the masculine traits of the modern male as an identity no longer relevant to an ever changing and diversifying postmodern world.

Together these texts demonstrate that women writers are drawn to the cyborg figure at different moments in post-war American history when gender relations are destabilised by major upheavals such as war or by significant changes in social, economic and political systems. The cyborg in women's writing is a

material entity that reflects the realities of women's, and men's lives in patriarchal culture, questioning the gendered social order. Importantly, the representation of disability positively contributes to the critical evaluation of gender in their work. Overall, the shift in focus from female to male cyborgs reflects the impact that feminist thought has had on changing cultural perceptions of gender and disability during the post-war era.

## **Section One**

### **Female Cyborgs: Frontier Women**

## **Chapter 1**

### **C.L. Moore's 'No Woman Born' (1944)**

This chapter explores how C.L. Moore's short story 'No Woman Born' (1944) raises issues concerning gender, disability and technology through the empowering hybrid figure of the cyborg. By looking at how Moore subversively uses conventional patriarchal tropes common in science fiction, I argue that her text explores two key themes: the gender bias inherent within the received relationship between technology and human evolution, and the social function of the disabled body rehabilitated through cyborg technology. While some critics have discussed 'No Woman Born' and issues of women and gender within the context of wartime America, such as Despina Kakoudaki and Benita Shaw, I aim to expand on this by demonstrating that Moore's narrative was indicative of wider social and cultural anxieties that concerned the gendered and disabled body during the closing stages of World War II.

To begin, I will situate 'No Woman Born' within the context of 1940's science fiction literature and the utilisation of the cyborg figure at that time. Offering a comparative reading of Moore's text with Henry Kuttner's cyborg text 'Camouflage' (1945), I will emphasise the uniqueness of Moore's narrative both in terms of her intervention into a male dominated genre, and as a proto-feminist text still of great significance today. In particular, I will argue that 'No Woman Born' is a cyborg text that anticipates Haraway's postmodern cyborg theory (1985). The central theme that connects the two texts is the disruptive potential of the cyborg figure as a feminine 'Other' that problematises human identity. The primary goal of this argument is to demonstrate how Moore's cyborg protagonist

destabilises and questions the validity of human identity, as gender is deconstructed through the reconstruction of the disabled body. I will demonstrate how Moore's text utilises the disabled body rehabilitated through technology to reflect wider social concerns over gender identities and explore issues that were pertinent to western patriarchal societies during the war years of the 1940s. It is within this context that I will explore how Moore uses gender and disability to bring together the feminine and the grotesque, through the figure of the cyborg, in a subversive critique of male desire for domination and control of the female body.

### **'No Woman Born'**

'No Woman Born' is a short story that first appeared in John W. Campbell's science fiction pulp magazine Astounding Science Fiction in December 1944. The story concerns three protagonists, the first being Deidre, a female performer whose body has been destroyed in a theatre fire. Deidre's brain, however, has survived. With the help of a brilliant scientist named Maltzer, Deidre is saved when her brain is transplanted into a prosthetic body made from electro-magnetic rings, powered and controlled by Deidre's mind. The story opens with Deidre's manager John Harris visiting her for the first time since the accident. Harris is apprehensive about meeting Deidre, his anxiety heightened when he discusses her recovery with Maltzer, who after a year of working on Deidre's transformation is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Harris's main concern is how Deidre is going to look, as he dwells on her former beauty: 'She had been the loveliest creature whose image ever moved along the airways... There had never been anyone so beautiful' (134). Maltzer finds Deidre's confidence in her 'new' body disturbing, especially when Deidre makes

it clear to him that she wishes to resume her career as a performer. In her new, strange, and exotic high-tech metallic body, Maltzer is convinced that Deidre will be rejected by her fans and admirers, and is concerned in the long term for her mental well-being, as he declares to Harris: 'I never saw a woman so confident.' [...] Of course a failure now would mean – well, absolute collapse' (137). Through the different viewpoints of the three protagonists, Moore creates tension, as she represents the prevailing prejudices of western patriarchal society towards empowered women, particularly women empowered by, and in control of, technology. Moore merges technology and the feminine through the trope of the female cyborg figure, but, rather than the cyborg being a figure controlled by patriarchy, Deidre, half-woman and half-machine, subversively questions the validity of such domination. Therefore, as a female cyborg, she is subversive, because she is a combination of two subordinates, a female and a machine, creating a figure that threatens patriarchy.

For the rest of the story, Deidre and the two men engage in a power struggle over who is to ultimately control Deidre's body and her future. As the battle ensues, Maltzer claims to know Deidre better than she knows herself as he attempts to control her by convincing her that she is mistaken if she thinks she can return to normal public life: 'When they turn against you, when they find out you're more helpless than they – I wish I could have made you stronger, Deidre' (181). However, Deidre is determined to make up her own mind, and throughout the text, she proves to the two men that she is stronger and more powerful than the scientist who made her. For instance, at a crucial moment when Deidre gives her first public performance since her accident, Harris is astounded by her abilities:

Now she swayed and came slowly down the  
steps, moving with a suppleness just a little  
better than human. [...] By the time she  
reached the stage floor she was dancing.  
But it was no dance that any human creature  
could have ever performed. [...] (Harris  
remembered incredulously that he had feared  
once to find her jointed like a mechanical robot.  
But it was humanity that seemed, by contrast,  
jointed and mechanical now.) (165-166)

Deidre exceeds the expectations of her male counterparts. In fact, the control she displays over her own body questions the categories that define human identity. In Deidre's new guise as a technologically enhanced woman, it is humanity that seems artificial, not Deidre, who is supple and 'better than human'. The positioning of a female character in such a central and powerful role, portraying a woman determined to control her own future through a confident engagement with technology, is what makes Moore's story unique for its time. Also, the merging of woman with machine as a means for promoting a progressive feminine figure for a future society is a concept that male science fiction writers either ignored, or simply failed to explore, during this period.

### **Gender and Human Evolution in 'The Golden Age' of Science Fiction**

Moore was writing during what is known as 'The Golden Age' of the Campbell Era of the 1930s and 1940s, when there was a demand for writers to

provide narratives ‘subtler than that of their predecessors: more polished stylistically, more character-driven, tighter in construction, more self-aware’ (Attebery 42). Previously, narratives offered the reader plenty of action, fantastic landscapes and scientific gadgetry, but little in the way of character development and style (Attebery 42). However, editor John W Campbell Jr. promoted gender-biased stories that were concerned with what critic Brian Attebery describes in his book Decoding Gender in Science Fiction (2002) as ‘the mutated superman’ who often possessed ‘psionic abilities’ (64). Psionics was a pseudoscience that predicted man’s next evolutionary leap - namely, the paranormal ability of the brain to not only act upon the physical world, but also to transcend it, uncovering the secrets of the universe. In these narratives, such as Edmond Hamilton’s ‘The Man Who Evolved’ (1931) and A.E Vogt’s Slan (1940), male science fiction writers envisioned advanced future humans as either men with brains enlarged and the body diminished, or as men possessing psionic powers (Attebery 64).

The emergence of such a representation of the all-seeing, all-knowing male superhuman is a trope developed from earlier science fiction stories that revered the male scientist’s intellect, mentally probing and voyeuristically gazing into a world that he desired to know, in order to control it (Attebery 48). Attebery explains the political implication of this gendered trope:

There is no way to imagine or to talk about such investigations without calling on the experience of the body – and the body upon which scientific knowledge is grounded in our culture is male. Indeed, it is only because science is so anchored



in the male experience that it can deny traces of  
that body and claim to be the product of pure  
consciousness. In a sense, only the female  
body is perceived *as* a body. The male body  
usually lies hidden in the concept of pure mind  
[...]. (48)

In Attebery's analysis, it is men who are associated with the mind and therefore with Western intellectual thought, while women are identified with the body. The logic of this thinking suggests that the body is a mass of inert matter devoid of intellect. Therefore, the body is encoded as passive and feminine, as opposed to the mind, which is active and masculine. While men act and think, women are deemed incapable of intellectual thought, or are simply passive bodies that need to be dominated and controlled. The phenomenon of a 'disembodied scientific objectivity' has been raised and discussed by Haraway in her article 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' (1988), where she refutes the cultural assumption that science is a purely objective and value neutral activity. In what Haraway terms 'the god trick', she argues that 'vision' has become a metaphor in science that signifies 'a leap out of the marked body and into the conquering gaze from nowhere' (581). In Haraway's interpretation of scientific inquiry, she proposes that within the regime of patriarchy, science is a highly mediated phenomenon that has far reaching political implications in relation to how society, language and texts are structured and organised in terms of gender.

In Moore's story, Deidre's feminine intellect is at odds with conventional science fiction narratives of her day, where woman's gendered identity was often 'naturalised' as devoid of intelligence and primarily associated with her biological body. Deidre's mechanical body is neither organic nor easily naturalised as feminine. Her body is the product of patriarchal technology and is therefore aligned with masculine culture. To complicate matters further, Deidre's brain is female - the implications of this gendered reversal of mind and body is that we have a female in control of patriarchal technology. Through Deidre the cyborg, Moore disrupts gender hierarchies associated with the mind and body. It is a critique of the superior social identity of the all-knowing male who claims possession and control of knowledge, and hence power over his own and others' bodies. In the opening pages of 'No Woman Born', it is no coincidence that Moore describes Maltzer as looking through 'distorting lenses' (137), an indication of his faulty vision that will ultimately affect his assumed superior knowledge of and control over Deidre. In addition, Maltzer is described as 'a thin, wire-taut man with all the bone and sinew showing plainly beneath the dark skin of his face. Thinner now, than he had been a year ago when Harris saw him last' (137). Maltzer's body does not become insignificant because of an increase in intellect, therefore acquiring power over his object of study. Instead, his body deteriorates because of his failure to control or understand the technology he has passed on to Deidre. Maltzer's physical deterioration reflects his loss of power over his cyborg creation.

The equation of an advanced male intellect with physical oddity was an ambiguous male fantasy that science fiction writers, editors and publishers held about the evolutionary development of the human race (Attebery 64). While

speculation on the hidden possibilities of the human male brain fascinated and excited the science fiction community, the prospect of its outcome was also disturbing. From the result of external factors, such as exposure to ‘cosmic rays’ to a belief that ‘humans might well give birth to their own replacements’ (Attebery 64), writers produced a wide range of stories, expressing what Attebery describes as ‘paranoia, cautious optimism, devout belief and satire’ about how humans might evolve into super beings (64). A classic example that evokes the figure of Maltzer in Moore’s text is Edmond Hamilton’s protagonist Dr. John Pollard in ‘The Man Who Evolved’ (1931), who exposes himself to cosmic rays in order to mutate and evolve as a superbeing. The outcome produces a disturbing ‘thin and shriveled’ figure with an ‘immense bulging balloon’ head (Attebery 64).

Representations of the diminished or mutant body expressed male anxiety over masculine identity both in terms of mental and physical prowess. Science fiction narratives were at odds with contemporary social concerns over an outward physical appearance that evoked the superior strength of the American male body. The diminished physicality of the admired intellectual scientist within the context of the mutant superman narratives emphasised a desire to depart from or transcend the body, thus marking the body as limited, feminine, even redundant, and serving to promote male superiority in terms of intelligence and ability (Attebery 64).

At the same time, advertisements that sat alongside such narratives promoted ‘scientific solutions’ for transforming ‘skinny bodies’ into ‘muscular sex appeal’ (Attebery 43-44). Physical masculine identity was neutralised and suppressed within science fiction literature, while advertisements portrayed an idealised image of masculinity as a desirable physical identity that had to be worked at and achieved. However, dealt with in different ways, both science

fiction literature and popular advertising of the 1930s and 1940s offer clear examples of how patriarchal culture attempted to elide the physical differences that exist between men. In the service of patriarchy, the aim was to offer a masculine ideal that would create a coherent male identity, to which all men must aspire, and against which all other identities would be defined as feminine and 'Other'. In comparison, Moore's narrative examines the social and political implications of physical difference when a body is destroyed and rehabilitated to perform a particular gendered function. In Moore's text, the technological enabling of the disabled body, an amalgamation of the organic and prosthetics, raises issues about science fiction's assumed gender neutral human identity. Through the rehabilitated body, Moore explores the concept of how the human functions when gender identity is physically and socially reconstructed.

### **Henry Kuttner's 'Camouflage' (1945): The Male Cyborg and the Human**

As I have discussed in the introductory Chapter, at the time of Moore's writing, the cyborg as a body destroyed and rehabilitated into society was a newly emerging narrative in American science fiction. It is only later, with the popular emergence of cybernetics and its connection to the military and space travel that the physically impaired body begins to recur as a possible cyborg identity. However, there is one example from Moore's era that can be drawn upon to illustrate how gender and disability is treated that deals with the technological rehabilitation of a male protagonist, and illustrates how future narratives will re-tell this story. The story in question is titled 'Camouflage' and was originally published in Astounding Science Fiction in September 1945. 'Camouflage' was penned under the pseudonym Lewis Padgett, a collaboration between husband and

wife Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore. It has been established that under this particular pseudonym, Kuttner is mainly responsible for the narrative.

‘Camouflage’ is the story of an atomic scientist called Bart Quentin whose body is destroyed in an accident, but whose brain is salvaged to control a ‘transplant’ ship that transports atomic power plants across space. The drama is centred round a gang of criminals who plan to hijack both Quentin’s ship and his cargo for their own ends. One gang member, Van Talman, a former acquaintance of Quentin’s, is sent to visit him because the gang are worried that Quentin, in his new and altered state, may have developed telepathic powers.

Quentin’s brain has not been re-housed in humanoid form but instead placed within a ‘two-foot-by-two’ metal cylinder (56), which can be easily fitted into his ship. In this unusual guise, the notion of a human male body is completely erased. However, this does not seem to adversely affect the way others around Quentin think about him. In fact, Quentin’s ‘difference’ is accommodated, particularly by his loyal wife, who ‘naturally’ still adores him. This suggests that despite Quentin’s damaged body, his wife still acknowledges his dominance and authority over her. Additionally, the ability of Quentin to assimilate technology into his life is affirmed by a narrative that stresses the ‘natural’ connection between man and machinery. In a conversation with Talman, Quentin emphasises the extent to which his ability to pilot a ship has become enhanced through his ‘synthesis with a machine’: ‘Ever noticed, when you’re driving or piloting, how you identify with the machine? It’s an extension of you. I go one step farther. And it’s satisfying’ (58). Quentin even declares, ‘...I am the machine!’ but is careful to emphasise that he is no robot: ‘It doesn’t affect my identity, the personal essence of Bart Quentin” (58).

In Kuttner's narrative, being human is defined through a mystical and unquantifiable category such as 'personal essence', which is underpinned by the assumption that a man is naturally able to exercise his dominance over machinery. This definition of the human allows Quentin to occupy a social function acceptable and amenable to patriarchal values that constitute male identity. In this respect, Quentin's socially defined gender, already established in the narrative in his role as a scientist, is reaffirmed through an occupation conventionally befitting a man. He is a pilot and controller of a space ship, allowing his masculine identity to be re-mapped seamlessly onto his biological identity, his brain. In other words, despite Quentin's lack of an organic body, the narrative allows Quentin's unusual form and difference to be accommodated, promoting him as a new evolutionary figure fit for space travel. Quentin's ability to supersede his physical body without compromising his masculine identity and his humanness is further proved by his intellectual capacity to finally outwit his hijackers.

In a final showdown with his assailants, Quentin kills all but one of the criminals, the remaining criminal being Talman. Talman attempts to out-manoeuvre Quentin by engaging him in a conversation that is meant to psychologically undermine his self-worth and value as both a man and a human. However, as Anne Hudson Jones explains, in her article 'The Cyborg (R)evolution in Science Fiction' (1982), just as Quentin starts to doubt his own status, 'Only a semantic slip restores his sense of himself as human' (206): in a lapse of concentration, Talman claims that he would never have tried to kill Quentin, if Quentin were still human. At this point Quentin realises Talman's mistake, because as he points out, 'A machine can be stopped or destroyed Van,...But it

can't be – *killed*' (Kuttner 84). As Anne Hudson Jones concludes, 'Knowing that he [Quentin] is still perceived as human is sufficient to restore Quentin's sense of himself as human' (206).

### **The Female Cyborg: Beyond the Human?**

I would also argue that Quentin's 'sense of himself as human' is underpinned by the narrative's assumption that being human is a male preserve. In Kuttner's narrative, the male protagonist is placed in an ambiguous position and undergoes an identity crisis, only for that crisis to be resolved by finally proving that he is human and a man. In Moore's narrative, Deidre is not afforded such luxury - in fact, unlike Quentin, it is suggested that ultimately Deidre, despite her cyborg powers, is to be left with an uncertain future. Sarah Gamble argues that Moore's fiction repeatedly represents rebellious women who are finally restrained by the status quo, making any analysis of gender conflict in her work 'ultimately inconclusive' (48). Indeed, when Deidre proves her superior physical and intellectual power to Maltzer and Harris, her position in the world of men is still marginal, her status as human ambiguous. Deidre concedes that 'Humanity and I are far apart, and drawing farther' (Moore 189). However, Deidre's uncertain future also carves out a space in which she is able to posit the following science fiction question: What if? In a final soliloquy, Deidre speculates on the possibilities her new embodiment holds for the future: '...There's so much still untried. My brain's human, and no human brain could leave such possibilities untested. I wonder, though...I wonder,' she repeated, the distant taint of metal already in her voice' (193).

In the final words, 'the distant taint of metal already in her voice', expressing the viewpoint of the male narrator, there is the suggestion that Deidre is already losing her link with humanity. However, Deidre is excited about what her human brain can achieve in a body augmented by technology: 'My brain's human, and no human brain could leave such possibilities untested' (Moore 193). Here, Deidre questions the gender bias inherent within humanist conceptions of identity and demands to be recognised as equal to men and therefore to be recognised as human – a human who is capable of pioneering new technological developments for the benefit of humankind. Nonetheless, Deidre's bold claim is conditional, because it is dependent upon whether she is allowed the space to reconfigure a new and progressive cyborg identity, beyond the constraints imposed upon her by patriarchy. At the same time, Deidre's own final words suggest that she is prepared to take the risk and is willing to live a life that positions her on the margins of patriarchal society. In this alternate reading, Deidre evokes the main theme in Haraway's cyborg theory, which proposes that the cyborg is a bold step towards reconfiguring an identity that stands in opposition to the human. Rather than reaffirming the human, like Kuttner's cyborg protagonist, Bart Quentin, I would argue that Deidre's response to her new identity suggests a rejection of heteropatriarchal values that sustain traditional gender roles in western society.

Kuttner's story serves as a model for the many cyborg narratives that were to follow, especially those concerning the reconstruction of the disabled/destroyed male body. However, the same cannot be said about Moore's story. Moore's narrative was an almost forgotten tale except within science fiction circles. The obscurity of Moore's text has meant that historically, 'No Woman Born' has received little, if any attention in terms of feminist readings. As Brian Attbery



points out, Deidre, as a technologically empowered woman, has even escaped the attention of Haraway in her 'Cyborg Manifesto' (96). Nonetheless, in recent years, Moore's cyborg woman has attracted some critical response from feminists interested in the representation of women and technology in science fiction literature.<sup>10</sup> The attraction of Moore's text to feminist politics in relation to gender and technology has been the way it pre-empts the work of Donna Haraway. Moore, like Haraway, seizes upon men's ambivalence towards technology, and creates in Deidre a feminine cyborg figure that embraces the empowering effects of technology, a result that is both disturbing and threatening to her male counterparts. Moore's Deidre, like Haraway's cyborg figure, is unsettling, leaving the reader to speculate on the possible implications of a woman empowered by technology. Also, rather than abandoning the feminine, Moore, like Haraway, realigns the feminine with technology, challenging naturalised assumptions that always equate men and hence the human with possessing a 'natural' affinity with the technological world. I think Moore's text is a reflection of a wider social context, specifically the upheavals of World War II.

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<sup>10</sup> Baccolini, Raffaella, 'In-Between Subjects: C.L. Moore's 'No Woman Born,' Science Fiction, Critical Frontiers, eds. Karen Sayer and John Moore (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000) 140-153.

Hollinger, Veronica, '(Re)Reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, And The Defamiliarization Of Gender,' Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture, eds. Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002) 301-320.

Kakoudaki, Despina, 'Pinup and Cyborg: Exaggerated Gender and Artificial Intelligence,' Future Females, The Next Generation. New Voices And Velocities In Feminist Science Fiction Criticism, ed. Marleen S. Barr, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 165-195.

Shaw, Debra Benita, 'No Woman Born': C.L. Moore's Dancing Cyborg,' Women, Science and Fiction: The Frankenstein Inheritance, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000) 65-89.

## **World War II and the Destabilisation of Gender Roles**

Moore was writing at the closing stages of World War II when western patriarchal societies had been forced to make concessions to women by allowing them to take up public roles normally reserved for the male workforce. It was during the war years that the disruption of traditional gender roles caused great anxiety, because women demonstrated they were just as capable as men of developing technical skills to manufacture and operate machinery. Women, it seemed, had proved that they possessed an affinity with machines. In contrast, men were experiencing the adverse affects of what technology can do to the human body on the battlefield, the same technology many of the women were involved in producing.

Advances in medicine meant that more men who would have died with traumatic injuries on the battlefield survived, and wounded and physically disabled veterans were able to return home. According to statistics published by the Congressional Research Service in 2008, 671, 846 wounded WWII veterans returned to America, out of which 7,489 were amputees (CRS Report for Congress 9). Additionally, a new category of men survived, those who suffered spinal cord injuries and permanent paralysis, of which there is estimated to have been 2,500 (PVA 1). As I have already argued, the female disabled body disrupts the coherence of gender identity, and the same can be said of the disabled male body. Disability is associated with weakness and so with the feminine and feminisation, and this in turn meant that men returning from the war physically impaired created anxieties about masculine identity. As a result, an extensive social programme was developed in countries such as North America to rehabilitate the war veteran

into civilian society. In the meantime, women were rehabilitated either into the domestic sphere or lower salaried jobs.

The significance of this massive social upheaval was not lost on women science fiction writers of Moore's day. For instance Judith Merrill makes the following assessment of such times:

At the end of World War II, the wonderful  
working-mothers' day centres all closed down,  
and from every side the news was shouted that  
Woman's Place was after all In The Home.  
Newspapers, magazines, counseling services  
told us firmly that children who had less than  
constant attention from their *very own* mothers  
were doomed to misery and delinquency; the  
greatest joy available to the 'natural woman'  
was the pleasure of Building Her Man's Ego.  
(There were not enough jobs for returning veterans  
till the ladies went home.) (Sargent 25)

It is within this context that I read Moore's cyborg narrative as a story that tells of one woman's refusal to first of all leave the public sphere and, secondly, to take on her 'natural' role as 'woman' and build the egos of her fellow men. Instead Deidre is defiant towards Maltzer and is determined to perform in public, an intention she shares with her manager Harris: 'I've arranged for a performance,' she told him, her voice a little shaken with a familiar mixture of excitement and

defiance' (Moore 157). Although Deidre knows that Maltzer is physically deteriorating under the stress, partly due to the fact that she is so keen to openly express self-assurance and confidence, she also insists that it is 'no kindness to Maltzer to hide me under a bushel' (155). In fact, Deidre lauds Maltzer's achievements and what these achievements could mean to other people who have suffered injuries: 'The whole idea from the start was to re-create what I'd lost so that it could be proved that beauty and talent need not be sacrificed by the destruction of parts or all the body' (156). Deidre explains to Harris that it was not only for her that Maltzer re-created her body because Maltzer 'was seeing thousands of others beyond me as he worked' (156). Deidre therefore considers that in order to do justice to Maltzer's work, she needs to take the final step and perform the function she was re-created to do and become the dancer and singer she once was.

### **Critical Feminist Readings of 'No Woman Born'**

Feminist interest in the cyborg figure has produced some excellent and thought provoking readings of 'No Woman Born'. These readings have focused on the relationship between women and technology (Shaw: Kakoudaki), on issues relating to gender identity (Baccolini), and gender as performance (Hollinger: Kakoudaki). However, with the exception of Jane Donawerth's analysis of Moore's text, which argues that the inferiority of the mechanical woman is literalised through the disabled body (61), none have considered Moore's cyborg text as a narrative permeated with a language that alludes to the disabled subject and what this may mean in relation to the representation of gender in her story at the time of its publication. In fact, critic Despina Kakoudaki in 'Pinup and

Cyborg: Exaggerated Gender and Artificial Intelligence' (2000), rejects the disabled subject as a valid identity for exploring gender in Moore's text, stating, 'Most stories about artificial women either posit them as a priori beautiful or represent the beautiful constructed woman as foil or cover for the unseen/disabled woman' (172). Kakoudaki criticises science fiction's image of the mechanical woman because it is a recurring trope for representing male fantasies about man creating the ideal woman, whom he wishes to control. In such fantasies, technology erases the threatening presence of the female body, or alternatively, the impaired or faulty female body is corrected or perfected by technology. In the mechanical woman narrative, technology reconstructs an image of woman that is amenable to the male ego. Therefore, the beautiful woman is always a construct that displaces images of real women, who do not fit the patriarchal ideal of passive femininity. It is within this context that Kakoudaki interprets Moore's female cyborg as a reincorporation of woman as sexual spectacle by reading Deidre's repeated performances of femininity as a form of exaggerated gender. Kakoudaki relates Deidre's exaggerated gender performance to that of the female pin-up, which was a popular image utilised for patriotic purposes and for the military during wartime in North America. Kakoudaki explains that the spectacle of woman engaged with technology represents male fears about gender, technology, change, and the future, indicating that the feminine cyborg figure is recognised by Moore as a problematic model for female bodily representation. Ultimately, as Kakoudaki argues, it is a representation over which men and women struggle to gain control.

Veronica Hollinger echoes Kakoudaki's discussion of Deidre's performance of femininity and exaggerated gender. Hollinger theorises Deidre as

a proto-feminist techno-figure whose repeated performances of femininity uncouple 'the essentialist ontological categories' that associate biology with gender (308-309). Citing Butler, she explains: 'Performativity' is a 'turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of contestation that is not a 'pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure' (307). What Hollinger means is that gender performance is informed by a relation of power which both constrain and open up the possibility of creating new identities. Like Haraway's theory of the cyborg's potential to disrupt patriarchal intentions of control over the feminine 'Other', Hollinger's Butlerian analysis of Deidre's doing and undoing of gender identity presents her as both a conventional and unconventional figure. Deidre possesses a fluid identity that is capable of demonstrating alternative possibilities that destabilises gender dichotomies in heteropatriarchal culture, but the space in which she exercises this freedom is limited, even prohibited. As Hollinger finally argues, 'In spite of Moore's (proto)feminist challenge to notions of gender construction and femininity – in spite of her suggestion of femininity as masquerade – her cyborg is, finally, trapped within the binarisms of a heterosexual perspective on the nature of woman' (310). Hollinger is correct in her analysis. However, she fails to explain why this happens to Deidre. Hollinger does not take into account the historical and material constraints that inform Moore's representation of Deidre's gender performance nor does she take into account Moore's choice to use the trope of the disabled/destroyed body. I consider there are limitations to Hollinger's interpretation of Moore's female cyborg. I am also drawn to her theory of performativity and gender. Of particular interest is Hollinger's assertion

that the ‘technobody’ in science fiction, such as the cyborg, subvert and disrupt gender power relations in heteropatriarchal culture (310). Later in this chapter, I will draw on Hollinger’s work to discuss the implications of Deidre’s gender performance which leads me to consider the benefits of utilising Kakoudaki’s work in my discussion.

While Hollinger omits the socio-historical context in her discussion of Deidre, Kakoudaki’s analysis is intriguing, because her argument places Moore’s text within an era and context that I think ‘No Woman Born’ should be read and which is echoed in the work of Benita Shaw. For example, in ‘No Woman Born’: C.L. Moore’s *Dancing Cyborg*’ (2000), Shaw explains that when the war was coming to an end it became clear that women were to return to the home as housewives: ‘...armament manufacturers seeking new areas of profit saw the potential for turning their former female employees into customers for new products’ (72). In short, woman’s engagement with new technology during the post-war era would assist in transforming her into the ideal ‘cheerful and glamorous housewife’ (Shaw 73-74). In Shaw’s analysis, as in Kakoudaki’s, Deidre is a figure that at once evokes and subverts the male fantasy of woman under the control of patriarchal technology.

### **Deidre: A Progressive (R)evolutionary Figure**

Expanding upon Kakoudaki’s and Shaw’s analyses of Deidre and their socio-historical contextualisation of ‘No Woman Born’, I will analyse Moore’s story as a science fiction narrative that reflects anxieties about gender and the disabled body during and after World War II. By taking issue with Kakoudaki’s statement about the representation of artificial woman as being a foil or cover for

the unseen/disabled woman, I will discuss how and why I think Moore represents Deidre's cyborg body through a mode of absence and presence. What I mean by the term 'absence and presence' is that Moore deliberately uses the image of the technological body to elide, as well as evoke, Deidre's organic female body. It is through the displacement of the natural body by a constructed mechanical body that Moore disrupts cultural assumptions that equate biology with that of gender identity. Therefore, by understanding Deidre as embodying an identity that is destroyed and then reconstructed, I propose to argue that Moore denaturalises femininity as an identity that essentially belongs to woman. I will link this discussion of gender with that of disability, as Moore explores Deidre's dilemma when coerced into functioning according to gendered expectations.

Kakoudaki dismisses the trope of disability in her analysis, missing the significance of the rehabilitated body in Moore's text. Unlike Kakoudaki, I do not think that Moore considers the cyborg figure a problematic model for female bodily representation. On the contrary, I think Moore recognises the cyborg as a subversive figure that exposes the gender binary of masculinity and femininity as a problematic cultural phenomenon, which at least needs to be questioned, if not remedied. In my interpretation of 'No Woman Born', I propose to follow Anne Hudson Jones's discussion about science fiction stories 'that show the cyborg as a being so radically altered as to be (almost) a new species' (203). As Hudson Jones concludes, if rapid technological progress places humanity in an era of participant evolution, then 'we may need to change our definition of the human' (209).

Hudson Jones's observation is echoed in Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' when she claims: 'By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short



we are cyborgs' (150). While Hudson Jones does not comment on the gendered implications of changing 'our definition of the human', gender is central to Haraway's discussion of technology. Haraway's address is primarily aimed at women. She uses the cyborg to persuade women that, 'our time, a mythic time', (meaning that we now exist in a postmodern culture where myth and reality are of equal value) is a specific moment in history where women should engage with technology, if not directly, then at least by intervening into discourses of technology. As Haraway implies, discourses of technology are narratives that draw upon mythical symbols such as chimeras and cyborgs from popular culture in order to explain scientific developments and ideas in society. Often, these developments and ideas are oppressive to women. However, if, as Haraway claims, 'we are cyborgs', then women, who are 'theorized and fabricated hybrids of human and machine', are in a key position from which to deconstruct the mythic narrative forms that permeate science, exposing the gender bias of patriarchal language that constructs the human. Like Hudson Jones, Haraway recognises the potential of the cyborg figure in redefining or even rendering obsolete human identity. Similarly, I see Moore's Deidre as a cyborg that questions human identity, representing woman as a progressive (r)evolutionary figure that has the ability to transform patriarchal society and woman's inferior position in it. It is within this context, I will argue, that Moore produces a narrative and a female protagonist that is constrained by as well as resistant to patriarchal attempts to efface the feminine from the public sphere. It is from this perspective that I want to explain the political significance of gender, disability and difference which Moore's cyborg protagonist Deidre embodies.

Historically, in science fiction, the image of woman as an evolutionary figure taking an active part in a technologically progressive future has suffered from what Brian Attiebery has described as the ‘Wonder Woman complex’:

Part of the trouble is that the master evolutionary narrative which generates the notion of a super male offers an extrapolative path toward superwoman. Exaggerate the traits that the megatext associates with masculinity and you get the stronger, smarter, faster, more aggressive, more inventive superman of SF tradition. Exaggerate the feminine traits and you get someone who erases herself from the story. The female function, according to Darwin and Spencer, is to follow, to accommodate, to receive, to deny self. Where, one wonders, did she go? (82-83)

In science fiction, it is evident that woman as a potentially progressive figure is fated to become no more than an empty signifier that has no use or place in the public sphere of patriarchal society. Indeed, at the end of Moore’s narrative, the reader is left to speculate how a technologically empowered woman like Deidre is going to exist and function in a society that excludes her. However, the danger of Deidre disappearing is not due to the exaggeration of essential feminine traits, as described by Attiebery because, as I have argued, Deidre’s cyborg identity re-aligns the feminine with technology and masculine culture. Instead, Moore’s text offers a critique of essential gender traits by allowing Deidre’s cyborg identity to

alternate between two states of being, the old Deidre and the new Deidre. The old Deidre is the woman who manifests when she performs femininity. The new Deidre is a cyborg, whose organic brain is housed in a metal body, defying a clear gender identity. In this context, Deidre embodies a liminal identity that signifies both her womanly presence, as well as its absence, but also Deidre embodies an identity that promises a life beyond the constraints of conventional gender roles. Deidre's liminal identity is unsettling because it not only destabilises feminine identity, but also threatens the stability of masculinity. Through the figure of the cyborg, I believe that Moore deliberately plays with the destabilising effect of Deidre's hybrid identity. It is a response to contemporary social concerns about the disruption of gender roles and the desire to erase the presence of women from the public sphere in the context of World War II.

### **Effacing the Feminine: Deidre A Modern Woman Resisting Erasure**

Moore uses imagery that removes any trace of woman from Deidre's new form. When Harris meets Deidre for the first time, he is apprehensive about what she will look like: 'Subconsciously he had been dreading some clumsy attempt at human features that might creak like a marionette's in parodies of animation' (Moore 142). However, Harris is momentarily reassured: 'They had not tried to make a wax image of the lost Deidre' (142). Instead of a macabre copy of Deidre, Harris is presented with a reconstructed Deidre whose gold metallic bodily surface emulates the warmth and colour of her once 'sleek hair and the apricot tints of her skin' and whose face is now 'only a smooth delicately modelled ovoid for her head' (142). In addition, Deidre's gaze is subdued as she looks through a crescent shaped mask filled with a cloudy crystal that is 'tinted with the aquamarine of the

eyes Deidre used to have' (142). Harris is relieved that Deidre has not been given 'two eye-shaped openings with glass marbles inside them' (142). He considers: 'The mask was better for the woman within. It was enigmatic; you did not know if her gaze was on you searchingly, or wholly withdrawn' (142-143). Deidre is featureless and looks out of an 'expressionless golden helmet' of which, Harris muses, 'Brancusi himself had never made anything more simple or more subtle than the modelling of Deidre's head' (143).

Moore's representation of Deidre's new form as simple, featureless, expressionless and enigmatic that is reassuring to Harris's gaze is, I would argue, a popular cultural image of the shopwindow mannequin appropriated by Moore. It is an image that expresses patriarchal concerns about the physical presence of women in the public sphere. Art historian Tag Gronberg explores this in his article 'Beware Beautiful Women: The 1920s Shopwindow Mannequin and the Physiognomy of Effacement' (1997). He demonstrates that in the early twentieth century the public image of the shop window mannequins shifted from being what fashion magazines in Europe and America termed 'horrible simpering wax figures' into the 'modern mannequin,' whose skin was 'gilt' or 'silvered over, adding to its strangeness', and whose facial features were 'a mere cubistic chaos of intersecting surfaces' (379). As Gronberg argues, the mannequin served a dual purpose, the first being that it was an image of modern woman made to appeal to the female consumer, and in the second, 'modern mannequins assuaged the unease provoked by a too-close resemblance of wax figures to the female body' (379).

The political implications of the 'erasure of the female physiognomy...in order to claim it as modern' is, according to Gronberg, a violent act of obliteration (389). Facelessness connotes the erasure of identity, emphasising the 'objectness

of the modern mannequin' (390). In short, stylized mannequins translated the ambivalent and threatening figure of the woman who wants and desires, into a controllable, idealized non-desiring woman (Gronberg 391). More importantly for the male ego, it was also a way to erase the threat of the feminine from the public sphere by removing the presence of the 'endlessly repeated simulacra of the female body,' which as Gronberg concludes, speaks of 'modern man's anxiety and hysterical need for reassurance' (391).

In Moore's cyborg narrative, as in the narratives concerning the mannequin, the feminine is effaced from the public sphere. In her new high-tech physical form Deidre represents this process of effacement. In this respect, Moore's text expresses an underlying concern voiced by patriarchy about women, visibility, and the modern city, which became integral to debates about the relationship between gender, modernity and technological progress (Wollen 21, 22, 38). For instance, Deidre's new cyborg form is acceptable if it functions according to patriarchal requirements. As long as woman remains an object of desire for male consumption, then her place in contemporary society as a modern woman is sanctioned by patriarchy. However, if modern woman exceeds her passive feminine role to instead actively participate in reconfiguring a self that is beyond patriarchal control, then her technologically enhanced identity is viewed as a troubling threat to patriarchal masculinity.

The cyborg as an ambiguous figure, destabilising patriarchal authority, reflects Haraway's fascination with the subversive meanings that the technologically enhanced body generates. Deidre embodies ideologies that celebrate the wartime drive for technology, as she benefits from her augmented body. At the same time, Moore makes it clear that Deidre's physical form has

evolved from a collaborative effort between Deidre and the scientist Maltzer. Deidre chooses her new form and is a modern woman, who is potentially a woman of the future. The erasure of Deidre's organic body by patriarchal technology signifies a moment when women were threatened with erasure from public life. Nonetheless, Moore's narrative is also an attempt to present the reader with a female protagonist who resists such an erasure. Ultimately, through Deidre's high-tech cyborg identity, Moore challenges the effacement of women from public life because she refuses to be controlled by Maltzer, who is desperate to persuade Deidre back into the private sphere. It is within this context that I will now consider Deidre's body as an articulation of the troubling and disturbing image of a technologically progressive woman expressed through a discourse of disability.

### **Language, Disability and Femininity**

The language of disability pervades Moore's text. For instance, when Deidre is about to make her first performance since her accident, Maltzer discusses her physical and mental state with Harris and associates her new form with physical impairment:

If she only weren't so...so frail. She doesn't  
realize how delicately poised her very sanity is.  
We gave her what we could – the artists and the  
designers and I, all gave our very best – but she's  
so pitifully handicapped even with all we could do.  
She'll always be an abstraction and a ... a freak,  
cut off from the world by handicaps worse in

their way than anything any human ever suffered  
before. (162)

Maltzer's concern is gender biased - it is not so much Deidre's inability to function in her new body, but his own narrow attitude of gender that determines how Deidre should function socially in a body that possesses an indeterminate identity. To Maltzer, Deidre is no longer human. In contrast, Harris offers the reader an interpretation that is far more radical: 'She isn't human,' Harris agreed slowly. 'But she isn't pure robot either. She's something somewhere between the two, and I think it is a mistake to try and guess just where, or what the outcome will be' (Moore 161). However, throughout the narrative, Maltzer remains unconvinced and, in an attempt to dominate and control Deidre's destiny, continues to view her as 'fragile', 'vulnerable', 'helpless', and 'incapable', as he portrays himself as the only man who can save her from herself. Through Maltzer's dialogue, the feminine is associated with disability, a cultural association identified by Rosemarie Garland Thomson in her essay 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory' (2002):

Female, disabled, and dark bodies are supposed  
to be dependent, incomplete, vulnerable, and  
incompetent bodies. Femininity and race are  
performances of disability. Women and the  
disabled are portrayed as helpless, dependent,  
weak, vulnerable, and incapable bodies. Women,  
the disabled, and people of color are always ready

occasions for the aggrandizement of benevolent  
rescuers, whether strong males, distinguished  
doctors, abolitionists [...]. (5)

Deidre performs a mode of femininity that is valued by and conducive to patriarchal society. At times, Deidre's performance is so convincing that Harris is unable to distinguish between the former Deidre and the new Deidre. As Harris observes: 'The indomitable Deidre herself shone so vividly though the metal that his mind kept superimposing one upon the other' (Moore 153). However, she is not able to convincingly perform this masquerade all the time. When Deidre fails in her femininity, her link to humanity is deemed lost, and her deviation is articulated as a relationship between outward appearance and sexuality. In Maltzer's narrow opinion, Deidre is disabled. This is due to the fact that she is no longer able to compete sexually for male attention: 'Of course she can't compete,' he said irritably. 'She hasn't any sex. She isn't female any more' (160). Deviating from the female, as Garland Thomson argues, is often expressed through a discourse of disability, 'the language of deficiency and abnormality simultaneously...devalue women who depart from the mandates of femininity by equating them with disabled bodies' (5). Consequently, 'a pathologically "love deficient" woman' is fitted to the 'cultural stereotype of the ugly woman' suggesting 'how sexuality and appearance slide into the terms of disability' (Garland Thomson 5).

In Maltzer's view, however, Deidre is not so much ugly but 'grotesque' (Moore 139), indicating a body that is imbued with some mode of excess (Hollinger 309). At the same time, Deidre represents lack because she is unable to



function in ways Maltzer thinks a woman should: 'One of the strongest stimuli to a woman of her type was the knowledge of sex competition. You know how she sparkled when a man came into the room? All that's gone, and it was an essential' (160). Deidre's identity alternates between the 'flesh-and-blood woman' of her former years (146) and the 'creature in armor' that is her reconstructed body (144). Deidre's hybrid identity of woman and machine embodies a series of oppositions that destabilise her position within heteropatriarchy, subverting an ideal femininity. When Harris hears Deidre's voice, his mind conjures up an image of her as she once was: 'In spite of himself he said, 'Deidre!' and her image rose before him as if she herself had risen unchanged from the chair, tall, golden, swaying a little with her wonderful dancer's poise' (140). However, when he finally gazes upon Deidre's new form, he realises that the image is merely a fantasy: 'Then the shift of perspective took over, and even more shockingly, eye and brain said, 'No, not Deidre – not human' (141).

### **Disability Destabilising Human and Gender Identity: Deidre's Alternate Femininity**

Deidre's inability to pass as human because of a failure to successfully perform femininity at all times is further complicated by a body that is defined as disabled. Deidre embodies both lack and excess in the sense that she is both more and less than human, but never fully human. Her destroyed/disabled body unsettles the stability of an ideal feminine gender identity defined for her by patriarchy. Instead, she controls a prosthetic body with her organic mind, creating a hybrid identity that culturally evokes the feminine Other. Similarly, Haraway's

hybrid cyborg of human and machine embodies the feminine 'Other'.

Additionally, Thomson has argued that within the context of postmodern discourse, Haraway's cyborg celebrates the fragmentation of identity and updates and re-articulates mythical notions of the grotesque on its own terms, as positive and empowering. In this respect, Moore's cyborg, like Haraway's cyborg figure, embraces the destabilising effects of technology upon the human body and the opportunity this presents for creating a new post-human identity. As Haraway claims, 'The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code' (Haraway 163). Here, Haraway implies that the cyborg possesses an open, fluid identity that refuses simple categorisation. The cyborg communicates personal desires while also expressing a collective desire for social change. In this respect, the cyborg signifies excess. It is a figure that refuses containment. As a cyborg, Deidre's excess signifies a woman who wants and desires something far more than patriarchal society is willing to give her: empowerment and equality. Deidre wants to be accepted as a technologically enhanced human, and she is not a woman who gives up easily. Therefore, what Deidre desires is to retain a fulfilling public life, which is what her male counterparts find so disturbing.

Deidre's desires are articulated through an alternative mode of femininity. Beneath the demure gaze of Deidre's mask and her ability to reassuringly evoke in Harris's and her audiences' minds her former feminine beauty, Deidre also evokes a femininity that is disturbing and threatening to both Maltzer and Harris. It is the mesmerising and hypnotic presence of the Medusa. Throughout 'No Woman Born', Deidre's identity is marked by her own unique bodily movement and by her voice. As Brian Attiebery has argued, 'Her laughter signifies the opposite of

absence. It is the abundant, explosive laughter of Helene Cixous's Medusa, the woman released from patriarchal bounds' (95). Deidre's body also speaks of patriarchy's worst fears. Moore, drawing upon her own repertoire of work, gives Deidre a bodily presence that refuses to be suppressed and evokes, as Attebery explains, the overpowering qualities of the Medusa-like heroine who appeared in her earlier story 'Shambleau' (1933) (Attebery 95).

When Harris makes his first assessment of Deidre's appearance, she is initially passive, almost absent, but when Deidre becomes active and animate, Harris's initially assured thoughts on her are shaken. Deidre explains to Harris that her brain controls her body: 'So this body...works entirely through the brain. Electromagnetic currents flowing along from ring to ring...The same impulses that used to go out to my muscles go out now to – this' (Moore 147). Her bodily motion is described as 'serpentine,' akin to a 'Cambodian dancer' (147). Deidre is snake-like, strange and exotic, mesmerising Maltzer and Harris as well as her audience, a metaphor that recurs throughout the narrative. This not only suggests that she is a hybrid of human and machine, but also human and animal, anticipating Haraway's attempt to break down the rigid binaries of patriarchal language through the partial and incomplete identity of the cyborg's hybrid relationship between human/animal/machine.

Despite Deidre's fluid identity, Maltzer insists that she is unable to perform the gendered function he has designed her to fulfil, even though Deidre repeatedly demonstrates that she is more than capable of doing so: 'And she was a woman now. Humanity had dropped over her like a tangible garment' (Moore 168). As a cyborg, Deidre's gender performance is illusory, fleeting and unnatural. To Harris and Maltzer, Deidre's masquerade is considered no more than a cynical attempt to

convince them of her humanity. Deidre's unusual physical status of being a human brain housed in a mechanical body shows how the disabled body disrupts naturalised representations that impose a causal link between the organic body and socially gendered and sexualised identities. At the same time, Deidre represents a woman in full control of her own mechanical body as well as the technology that constitutes her new identity. It is a representation not usually portrayed as belonging to the realm of the feminine. In Moore's text it appears the feminine is undergoing a reconstruction. No longer confined to performing a femininity that assuages male anxieties, Deidre's new identity is excessive because, in relation to such a narrow definition of woman, she makes it clear that she desires and promises much more.

### **Maintaining the Social Order: Prostheses and the Reconstruction of Gender Identity in Post-War America**

Moore's narrative on the rehabilitation of Deidre's physically impaired body parallels what was happening in the wider scientific, medical, and social community, namely that prosthetics were being developed and used along the lines of socially sanctioned, gendered roles. For instance, Katherine Ott's article, 'The Sum of Its Parts: An Introduction to Modern Histories of Prosthetics' (2002) uses the image of a woman looking in the mirror, carefully and skilfully applying lipstick with a prosthetic hand and includes the following caption:

One indication of a prosthesis's success,  
mentioned throughout the professional  
literature on prostheses, is that the wearer

be able to participate in courtship rituals,  
such as dancing and dating; the ultimate  
accomplishment is marriage. This woman  
in the 1940s Science Service photograph,  
uses a hand that is imperceptibly prosthetic  
in applying lipstick. (9)

While Ott's emphasis in her article is on the practical and material application of bodily prosthetics in order to rehabilitate the individual into society, this image also signifies the extent to which prostheses were developed in order to reconstruct and normalise the individual as 'naturally' feminine or masculine. In David Serlin's 'Engineering Masculinity: Veterans and Prosthetics after World War Two' (2002), a contrasting image is shown of a man with a prosthetic arm lighting a cigarette, with Serlin giving the following explanation:

Professional photographs of veteran amputees  
using new prosthetic devices to perform "normal"  
male activities – such as lighting and enjoying  
a cigarette – were deliberate attempts to challenge  
the reputation of the male amputee as ineffectual  
and effeminate. (61)

Serlin makes it clear that although the reality of life for returning veterans with amputations was a far cry from the propaganda images of military and state

funded social programs, the preference nevertheless was to rehabilitate disabled male bodies 'to assume the idealized stature of "real" American men' (46).

In Serlin's image, there is little attempt to make the prosthetic pass as a human hand as in Ott's example. Instead, the artificial arm is openly displayed as the latest in modern technology, offering a futuristic representation more in keeping with science fiction, suggesting that a human/machine interface is more naturally suited to men. This, in turn, silently assumes the gender-neutral position of men's human-ness, while also emphasising a socially sanctioned masculine status, demonstrated through a capacity to control technology. In contrast, any suggestion of an intuitive human/machine interface is not apparent in Ott's image, instead the prosthetic is meant to convey a seamless performance of femininity.

### **Rehabilitating Masculinity**

The reconstruction of gender 'norms' through the rehabilitation of the destroyed/disabled body is central to Kuttner's science fiction narrative 'Camouflage' (1945). In Kuttner's story, Bart Quentin's new identity as human and machine is fully accommodated both by society and particularly by his wife, as he is rehabilitated and restored to his former human and hence masculine status. This reflects social attitudes in North America at the time, where women were expected to take up traditional feminine roles in order to accommodate returning veterans. As Rebecca Jo Plant points out in her article, 'The Veteran, His Wife And Their Mothers: Prescriptions For Psychological Rehabilitation After World War II' (1999), 'historian Susan Hartmann's 'Prescription for Penelope,'... shows how experts pressured young women to resume traditional feminine roles, placing their husbands' needs above their own' (2). The same was true for those women

whose returning husbands or sweethearts were physically disabled veterans (Plant 2). The faithful and unfailingly loyal wife or girlfriend in the postwar years became a recurring motif, and is offered as a fine example in Kuttner's future tale when Linda Quentin directly addresses Bart's former friend Van Talman and insists: 'He's still Bart,' she said quietly. 'He may not look it, but he's the man I married alright. So you can relax, Van' (56). Despite the fact that her husband resides in a two-foot-by-two cylinder, Linda is able to adjust to his new if unusual status as human and machine, performing her 'natural' role as a woman and boosting her man's ego.

### **'handicaps, [...] I haven't got any!': The Celebration and Suppression of Women's Capabilities**

The same cannot be said of Maltzer's and Harris's attitudes towards Moore's cyborg protagonist Deidre. Deidre is able to perform the function she was re-created to do and perform her socially sanctioned feminine role as a dancer and singer. However, Deidre's demand for acceptance in her new mechanical form is rejected. This stands in sharp contrast to Bart Quentin who is allowed to demonstrate his more than human abilities to outsmart his foes proving his masculinity and his human-ness. Nonetheless, Deidre continues to voice her opinions on what she believes her new technologically enhanced body is capable of doing. As Deidre states, with regards to 'handicaps, [...] I haven't got any!' (Moore 157). It is only those around Deidre and society at large that impose such a condition upon her, but Deidre knows she is capable of much more, if given the chance.

Through a lengthy monologue, Deidre articulates her capabilities not in terms of conventional femininity, but in terms of the world of men and their relationship with machines and technology. Deidre marvels at the power of the human ego and the ability of people to impress upon the inanimate world their own personalities (Moore 149). In a desire to have control over her own body, Deidre expresses her fantasy in terms comparable to the traditional male fantasy that desires control over the inanimate and technological world:

[...] in wars you always hear of planes crippled  
too badly to fly, but struggling back anyhow with  
their crews. Even guns acquire a sort of ego.  
Ships and guns and planes are 'she' to the men  
who operate them and depend on them for  
their lives... Well after a while I began to  
accept the idea that this new body of mine could  
behave at least as responsively as a ship or a plane.  
Quite apart from the fact that my own brain  
controls its 'muscles.' I believe there's an  
affinity between men and the machines they  
make. They make them out of their own  
brains, really, a sort of mental conception  
and gestation, and the result responds to the  
minds that created them, and to all human  
minds that understand and manipulate them.  
(149-150)



In this discourse of the body as an inanimate machine that is brought to life and controlled by the male ego, Moore draws upon the imagery of war machinery in order to describe Deidre's new techno-body. Although Deidre explains that men refer to such machinery as 'she', nonetheless, they are machines that represent the feminine body as robust, dependable and even muscular, which empower and protect the male user. Ships and planes that carry male passengers across hostile environments and protect them in vulnerable situations are vessels that evoke the maternal body, which is conventionally understood to be under the control of patriarchy. Moore's use of language acknowledges this gendered power relation. At the same time, Moore describes and praises the creative potential of the male mind with language normally associated with the reproductive power of the female body: 'They make them [ships and planes] out of their own brains, really, a sort of mental conception and gestation, and the result responds to the minds that created them' (150). Implicitly, this strategic use of language refers to feminine power that patriarchy both reveres and fears, which often emerges in a male fantasy of men creating life independently of the female body. Deidre's praise of the human mind through feminine imagery is also an attempt by her to stake a claim for her own mental abilities.

In a desire for power and control over own body, Deidre considers herself in a kinship that is more often presented as existing between men and machines. It is Deidre's fantasy of the relational quality that can exist between the minds of men and their technological feminine bodies, but it is also a bid to claim equality for the female mind: 'So this is myself,' she said. "Metal – but me...It's my house and the machine my life depends on, but much more intimately in each case than any real house or machine ever was before to any other human' (Moore 150).

Here, Deidre's desire for control over her own body incorporates imagery connoting the feminine and the domestic sphere. This suggests that a new independent Deidre is not only intending to maintain a public life, but also, she is intending to dominate the private sphere of home life as well. However, Deidre's fantasy of control over both the public and private sphere is modified by Moore's narrative through the thoughts of her male counterpart Harris, who, in an aside, reminds the reader that: 'A dweller in a house may impress his personality upon the walls, but subtly the walls, too, may impress their own shape upon the ego of the man' (151-152). Here, Moore utilises conventional gender roles to subtly express contemporary male fears about the domestic sphere and how it is meant to function. It is important to patriarchy that it is the man who dominates the home. Although the home is encoded as feminine, meaning that it is a woman's domain, the domestic sphere must nonetheless function to support and nurture the male ego, sanctioning male authority.

Harris's internal thoughts counter Deidre's desire for self-determination and evoke instead western patriarchy's desired image of woman as an idealized heroic helpmate to her returning war weary man, rather than being his equal. However, this aggressive promotion of such a preferred image of woman was not enough because women were also vilified. An example of this can be found in the work of contemporary writer Philip Wylie in his 1942 bestseller Generation of Vipers (Plant 3). In Wylie's text, he infamously coins the word 'momism' reflecting social attitudes that developed towards women during the 1940s, particularly middle-class mothers. 'Momism' portrayed mothers as pathological, blaming them for any poor physical and psychological performances that young American soldiers may have displayed in battle situations. In fact, mothers were

held responsible for depriving the American male of his right to manhood, and were even considered a threat to national security (Plant 3).

The counter image to this maternal threat was the girlfriend or wife who, as Rebecca Jo Plant explains, 'could steer the veteran toward greater self-reliance, if necessary by acting as a buffer between mother and son. When she herself needed guidance, the wife turned not to an older, more experienced woman, but to the veteran's psychiatrist or doctor, who embodied the paternal authority deemed sorely lacking in the typical American home' (4). In this inter-generational debate, younger women were particularly targeted and aggressively coerced into making the same 'mistakes' as their mothers. It was made clear that America wanted a new compliant generation of women, not strong-willed, independent women who were perceived to threaten the masculine status of 'real' American men. Deidre, within the context of this social attitude towards women, is obviously a problematic and dangerous representation of woman in relation to the gender ideals of a patriarchal society of North America, particularly at the closing stages of World War II. In the final showdown between Deidre and Maltzer, Deidre - like Kuttner's protagonist Bart - is given a chance to prove her human status. However, unlike Bart, Deidre's future is uncertain and the narrative ultimately refuses to resolve the status of her new identity. Nonetheless, Deidre is offered the opportunity to articulate not only her mental ability to argue her opinions intelligently, but also to demonstrate her superior physical strength.

### **The Subversive Power of The Female Cyborg**

In what has been described by critics such as Andrew Gordon as a reinterpretation of the Frankenstein myth (196), Deidre and her maker finally

confront each other. In Moore's version, Maltzer, the transgressor of the laws of nature, is repentant but tries to manipulate his 'monstrous creation' by threatening to kill himself: 'We who bring life into the world unlawfully,' said Maltzer, almost thoughtfully, 'must make room for it by withdrawing our own. That seems to be an inflexible rule. It works automatically, the thing we create makes living unbearable' (Moore 180). To Maltzer, whether Deidre is happy in her new guise or not is of no consequence, she is still an aberration to him as he tries to get her to bend to his will, but mentally and physically she refuses to do so. Deidre demands equality as she counter argues Maltzer's position and makes it clear that she is not 'sub-human': 'There's a flaw in your argument, and I resent it. I'm not a Frankenstein monster made out of dead flesh. I'm my-self-alive. You didn't create my life, you only preserved it. I'm not a robot, with compulsions built into me that I have to obey. I'm free-willed and independent, and, Maltzer – I'm human' (183). At this moment, Deidre performs what Maltzer and Harris perceive as Deidre's perfect femininity, demonstrating to them her human-ness: 'I'm human,' she repeated, her voice humming faintly and very sweetly' (183). Deidre's voice is hypnotic, persuading her male onlookers that, 'She was robot no longer, enigmatic no longer' (Moore 183). Deidre is capable of moving in and out of femininity. Deidre's former self, as Harris remembers her, shines through her metallic body, as her sensual radiance of 'human personality' and 'warmth' overpower their senses, but when Harris and Maltzer break out of their hypnotic trance, they both conclude that she has 'deluded' and 'tricked' them (185). Deidre's continued inability to convince Maltzer and Harris of her femininity leads to Maltzer claiming that this is due to Deidre's 'own inadequacy' (186),

because as Maltzer believes, he has made her wrong (Moore 182) and therefore, she can never be fully human again.

This issue of women performing femininity in order to remain within the parameters of human identity was a contemporary concern, which, as Elaine Tyler May argues, found expression in wartime literature. For instance, Tyler May points out that in a war time pamphlet, American society is reminded that, 'it is essential that women avoid arrogance and retain their femininity in the face of their own new status...In her new independence she must not lose her humanness as a woman' (59). In Moore's text, this attitude towards women who dare step outside of their prescribed gender roles is reflected in the attitudes of Harris and Maltzer towards Deidre, which is equally resisted through the disruptive presence of her cyborg identity. However, if Deidre's 'humanness' is conditional and dependent upon performing femininity, then was Deidre ever fully human in the first place? What was Deidre's status before she acquired her new prosthetic body? Jane Donawerth argues that despite the fact that Deidre is re-made perfect, in the eyes of the male narrator she is still viewed as defective, 'establishing a norm for what constitutes the human' (63). Alternatively, I ask, how does the cyborg narrative function in relation to gender and disability that questions human identity, particularly within the context of North American culture, during the closing stages of World War II.

In Kuttner's cyborg narrative, the re-housing of Bart Quentin's brain into a metal shell destabilises his own human identity. In part, this situation is resolved by the presence of a wife who continues to treat him as a 'normal' human male. It seems that in both cyborg texts, the stability of human identity is dependent upon women performing femininity and remaining within their socially sanctioned

feminine roles. Elaine Tyler May's example of wartime literature supports this interpretation, which infers that if women 'retain their femininity,' then they are deemed to have achieved a state of 'human-ness.' In Moore's text, Deidre's gender performance always situates her outside of the human. Her femininity, when performed, is conceived to be 'a trick', which, in a wider social context, suggests that even though women may conform to patriarchal standards of femininity, she is still situated outside of the category human.

If gender is a social construct that is not natural but a cultural phenomenon, then, as Raffaella Baccolini argues, Deidre's performance also suggests that masculinity is equally dubious in securing a human identity for the male subject (Baccolini 141). As Baccolini states, 'Moore is thus opening a space for the critique of the traditional perception of women's identities by also deconstructing the traditional image of man' (146). This is particularly apparent when the stability of masculinity is dependent upon women adhering to her feminine role. For instance, when Deidre falters in her gender performance, the presence of her cyborg identity undermines the masculine status of her male counterparts. Baccolini points out that when Harris is confronted by the disturbing presence of Deidre's powerful machine body, he sits down 'bonelessly' and has 'no muscles', becoming 'speechless and unthinking' (Baccolini 146: Moore 142).

Maltzer's masculine identity is equally compromised by Deidre's display of confidence in her new body as Harris notices 'his face drawn into lines like the lines of a skull. All flesh seemed to have dissolved off his bones in the last year' (Baccolini 146: Moore 160). Alternatively, when she is willing to confine her identity to a prescribed feminine role, she maintains a link with humanity by guaranteeing her male counterparts their human identity and hence their

masculinity. This undoing and redoing of masculinity and human identity through a woman's faithful performance of femininity is an intriguing aspect of the cyborg in Moore's text. However, rather than reading this performance of femininity as an effacement of woman from the category human, I would suggest that the feminine operates as a disruptive force, which destabilises masculinity and human identity. Therefore, I would argue that one of the most empowering features of Deirdre's cyborg identity is the extent to which the organic/machine interface between brain and prosthetic body disrupts patriarchal discourses that naturalise gender and human identity.

Equally, I would argue that the disruptive force of Deidre's gender performance in Moore's text is underpinned by an identity that is also defined as disabled. In a body that is destroyed and reconstructed, Deidre's ability to move in and out of femininity is given an extra dimension of critical power. Her prosthetic body is artificially enhanced and reconfigured as both strong and robust, deconstructing patriarchal discourses that naturalise the feminine, women and the disabled subject as weak and 'Other' to the human male. Compared to Deidre's newly built body, it is the human male who is weak, embodying an identity that is suspect. Nonetheless, Deidre does admit that she has 'handicaps' (Moore 183), but I would argue that these handicaps are more to do with her being a woman in a patriarchal society that imposes limitations on her identity because of the differences she embodies. Rather than being seen as a natural consequence of her biological body, Deidre's 'handicap' has become a statement about what happens to conventional perceptions of a woman, who is empowered by patriarchal technology and seizes that power for her own purposes. It is not Deidre who is

disabled, but it is her threatening presence which creates a perception that is debilitating.

Technology has disrupted Deidre's gendered physical identity making her 'neither normal nor human' (Moore 186). Her identity and difference in this respect is positive, and rather than being marked as feminine and sub-human, Deidre demonstrates she is a cyborg, feminine and superhuman. Nonetheless, these terms 'sub-' and 'super-' human used in Moore's text are problematic because, as I have argued, the human is an identity that is destabilised by the presence of the cyborg and therefore difficult to quantify in any coherent way. If anything, the terms sub- and super- human situate Deidre outside the human, connoting some mode of lack or excess which cannot be contained by the category human, which in Moore's text has become an unstable and contested signifier. Instead, in Deidre's new guise, she has become something else, something that supersedes the human, which patriarchal language is as yet unable to name. Nonetheless, despite her abilities, to Maltzer, Deidre is still 'less than human' and will always be so (181).

Maltzer refuses to acknowledge the potential of his co-creation. However, Deidre, 'Frankenstein's monster', does not kill her maker, but instead she rescues him. In a feat of movement and strength that Moore describes as defying the normal physics of time and space, Deidre is able to be at Maltzer's side before he realises what she is doing, preventing Maltzer from jumping out of the skyscraper window and killing himself: 'Very gently and smoothly Deidre lifted Maltzer from the window sill and with effortless ease carried him well back into the safety of the room' (Moore 188). Despite and because of this act, Maltzer remains stubborn and refuses to accept Deidre's new physical form and abilities that situate



her outside acceptable patriarchal conventions of femininity and the feminine. Deidre admits to Maltzer that she is unhappy and that she and humanity are far apart: 'The gap will be hard to bridge' (189), is Deidre's perspective on the situation. This gap is also the division that exists between the sexes, and patriarchy's refusal to accept gendered and physical differences on their own terms, especially if they are a threat to male subject and the masculine ideals he is supposed to naturally embody. Indeed, Deidre is aware of the threat she poses to her male counterparts: 'Do you still think of me as delicate?' she demanded. 'Do you know I carried you here at arm's length halfway across the room? Do you realize you weigh *nothing* to me?' (189). Moore's image of Deidre rescuing Maltzer and carrying him across the room as if he weighs nothing is reminiscent of a mother effortlessly carrying her newborn baby son in her arms. It is a subversive image that emasculates the male protagonist evoking patriarchal fears of women's power that will find its way into the science fiction pulp magazines of the 1950s, when the cold war and momism is in full sway.

Unlike the women portrayed in these later texts, Deidre is not a woman who will submit to patriarchy. Instead she remains a woman who stubbornly refuses to give up her newfound freedom and strength. Deidre even dares to declare that she could tear the building down with her bare hands if she chose to. However, she demonstrates to Maltzer and Harris that she need not resort to such crude, masculine, destructive actions – instead, as Attebery argues, Deidre's technologically augmented body transforms her excessive, feminine Medusa laugh into a powerful and earth shattering roar of a cyborg (Attebery 95):

She put her head back and a deep, vibrating

hum gathered and grew in what one still  
thought of as her throat. It deepened swiftly  
and the ears began to ring. It was deeper,  
and the furniture vibrated. The walls began  
almost imperceptibly to shake. The room was  
full and bursting with a sound that shook every  
atom upon its neighbor with a terrible,  
disrupting force. (Moore 189)

It is an act that Harris finds alarming and disturbing as he realises the potential that Deidre possesses and speculates on the possibilities of her augmented abilities:

Her voice faded for a moment, and Harris  
had a quick and appalling vision of her  
experimenting in the solitude of her farm,  
testing the range of her voice, testing her  
eyesight could she see microscopically  
and telescopically? – and was her hearing  
as abnormally flexible as her voice? (190)

Through her actions at least, Deidre has persuaded Maltzer and Harris that she is not the helpless woman they believed her to be, but neither is she human. Deidre understands the capabilities that technology has given her as well as the limitations that have been placed upon her existence. Like humans, she is mortal: ‘My brain will wear out in another forty years or so. Between now and then I’ll learn...I’ll

change...I'll know more than I can guess today...' (193). Ultimately, Deidre's future identity is left uncertain. However, she makes it clear that she will not disappear but will retain her public life.

To conclude, the aim of this chapter has been to examine Moore's text 'No Woman Born' in relation to issues concerning gender and disability represented within the conventions of science fiction, and within the context of wider social issues of 1940s North America. In the first instance, I have argued that Moore's text can be read as intervening in science fiction conventions that offered a gender biased view of the relationship between technology and fantasies about human evolution that subordinated women to the all-seeing and all-knowing power of the scientist and the mutated and highly evolved superman. In the second instance, Moore's text can also be read as a comment on the gender biases that patriarchal society placed upon the rehabilitation of the disabled body leading up to and during the wars years of World War II, which found expression through science fiction texts that imagined the extraordinary potential of a human/machine interface.

Unlike the problematic representations of superwomen in science fiction, Deidre's acquisition of enhanced powers does not mean she disappears from the science fiction narrative. Stubbornly, Deidre has faith in her abilities and is willing to retain and try out her new identity. As a lone pioneering figure, Deidre may seem tragic. Nonetheless, she remains a problematic female protagonist to science fiction conventions. Powerful and technologically enabled women offered an image of woman as a potentially progressive figure who was capable of creating an egalitarian future society. In general, it was an image of woman that was not promoted or popularised during the closing stages of World War II.

Instead, at a moment when Cold War ideologies would take hold, strategies were being developed to contain women in order to facilitate their return to traditional roles. This meant that women were targeted with regressive images, depicting compliant and domesticated girlfriends and wives, whose patriotic duty included helping to rehabilitate the nation's returning war veterans into society, an example evident in Kuttner's narrative. At the same time, women were reminded of what they should not be, and how they should not behave, through the anti-maternal campaign of momism. In short, women were expected to step aside, move out of the public sphere and make way for their men, an act that Moore's Deidre was unwilling to perform.

Finally, Deidre exists within a patriarchal narrative space that imposes limitations on representations of unconventional and powerful women, which not only confines her, but which also allows the reader to speculate upon the limitless potential she possesses. Deidre is, to a certain extent, a utopian image of a future female, but she is also like Haraway's cyborg, a pragmatic figure. Here, I mean that Moore does not allow her cyborg to step out of the ideological constraints of her time. Instead, Moore leaves it to the reader to reflect upon and decide how they are implicated in Deidre's unknown and uncertain future. In this context, I believe that 'No Woman Born' is a stimulating thought experiment, pre-empting Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto.' Like Haraway's text, Moore, through her cyborg protagonist Deidre, prompts the reader to re-imagine strategies that are conducive to building progressive and inclusive societies that embrace and celebrate difference.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Anne McCaffrey's 'Brainship Series' (1961-1969)**

In my discussion of C.L. Moore's 'No Woman Born', I explored how patriarchal definitions of the feminine and the grotesque are reconfigured through the figure of the cyborg. In a cultural association of the female subject with the disabled body, I argued that the cyborg is a feminine figure that disrupts and subverts the concepts of the human, masculinity and ability as 'norm'. The context in which I analysed Moore's text situated the female cyborg as a progressive, (r)evolutionary figure, representing Moore's desires to break the constraints of patriarchal conventions embedded within science fiction narratives. I argued that these narratives subordinate the presence of women to the all-seeing and all-knowing male scientist. In addition, I placed my reading of Moore's text within the social and cultural upheavals of the closing stages of World War II, arguing that disability and gender became national concerns at a time when gender roles were destabilised. Such concerns found expression through the figure of the cyborg and science fiction. Particularly in the case of Moore's text, when women were coerced into traditional gender roles, facilitating the return of the American war veteran, the cyborg is presented as a technologically enhanced feminine figure resisting containment.

### **The Cold War and The Containment of Women**

In the years to follow, as Cold War politics influenced and shaped American life, containment defined the lives of American women, which meant a life-long devotion to domesticity. Women, as wives and mothers, reinforced

conventional gender roles, sustaining the American male and the American way of life. Nonetheless, as discussed by Robin Roberts, science fiction during the Cold War era reflected social anxieties about the containment of women and their subordination to patriarchy and its needs. Women in the home dominating the domestic sphere created both reverence and fear of female power, and this is especially evident in the American science fiction pulp magazines of the 1950s. Often texts, as exemplified by the classic works of Phillip Jose Farmer, for example 'The Lovers' (1952) and 'Mother' (1953), were accompanied by artworks depicting women as giant, powerful alien 'Others', who initially threaten the masculine identity of the male protagonist, only to be overpowered, controlled and even destroyed by male dominated technology (Roberts, A New Species 42).

### **Space Travel, New Frontiers and The Female Astronaut**

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when women were beginning to question the limited roles that they were expected to perform and find fulfilling, gender, science and technology emerged as a popular and contentious discourse, imagining women in the dominant role as space traveller and explorer. In a series of privately funded scientific tests, women proved that they were both physically and mentally more suited to space travel than men, providing a tentative, but no less controversial prospect that the pioneering years of space travel could be led by female astronauts (Weitekamp 11). In 1960, Geraldine "Jerrie" Cobb, a licensed pilot and an advocate for women's participation in America's space programme, successfully passed the physical tests of the Mercury Project. On August 19, in the same year, it was publicly announced to the America media that 'certain qualities of the female space pilot are preferable to those of her male colleague'

(Weitekamp 12). As a potential astronaut, Cobb's presence posed a threat to conventional expectations that space exploration was a male only occupation (Weitekamp 10-11). In the early days of the Cold War 'space race', technology seemed to promise women that there was life beyond their own unsatisfactory domestic routine and their limited vocations as wife and mother. As Margaret A. Weitekamp explains, at a moment when women were beginning to voice their discontent, the female astronaut debate 'highlighted the turmoil surrounding women's roles on the eve of the feminist movement' (10). In modern Western culture, where women are conventionally viewed as weak, incompetent, incomplete and even impaired when compared with men, developments in science and technology brought into question the social biases that maintained women in a subordinate position to men. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, in order to maintain male protagonists in a position of domination, science fiction represented women negated by technology. In the new age of space travel, when women were beginning to desire social change and empowerment, science was proving that it was women, rather than men, who possessed the superior qualities for pioneering new frontiers in space exploration.

### **Anne McCaffrey: The 'Brainship Series'**

It is within this socio-historical context that I wish to analyse the work of Anne McCaffrey. McCaffrey is the author and co-author of a collection of narratives described as the 'Brainship Series' that span several decades, finally ending with the short story, 'The Ship That Returned' in Robert Silverberg's science fiction anthology Far Horizons (1999). The texts that I will focus on are those written between 1961 and 1969 and consist of narratives about the

adventures of a physically impaired female called Helva, who is technologically adapted into a cyborg and given the task of piloting and controlling a spaceship. In 1969, the collection was published as the cyborg novel The Ship Who Sang. To begin, I will first of all introduce McCaffrey's 'Brainship' texts and outline the critical responses that these texts have received in relation to issues concerning gender and disability. I will discuss the validity and limitations of these criticisms in light of the constraints imposed upon McCaffrey as a woman writer working within the field of science fiction. Here I will argue that although critics have looked at McCaffrey's work in terms of either gender or disability, few have analysed her work from the perspective of both gender and disability. The main criticisms to be explored relate to issues surrounding gender stereotypes and the sentimental representation of the disabled subject.

In response to these criticisms, my aim is to establish how McCaffrey utilises the conventions of the space opera genre in order to subvert gender stereotypes of women in science fiction. It is from this perspective that I will argue that Helva is a literary response to traditional representations of powerful women subordinated by patriarchal technology in science fiction literature. Additionally, I will demonstrate how McCaffrey's female space traveller intersects with contemporary discourses on the female astronaut that emerged during the 1960s. In this context, I will argue for an understanding of Helva as an empowered female subject and will offer an alternative feminist interpretation of her cyborg identity, suggesting the subversive meanings that her confined body generate, when the feminine is intersected with the disabled body. Helva is associated with weakness and frailty through signifiers such as the feminine and physical impairment. However, through the merging of a female body with that of



a spaceship, I will argue that Helva also connotes a feminine identity that promotes women as both physically and mentally robust, suggesting that women are capable of roles that place them beyond the domestic sphere.

### **The Ship Who Sang**

McCaffrey is a post-war North American science fiction and fantasy writer, whose narratives blend science fiction with the fairy tale genre (Roberts, Anne McCaffrey 6, 67). The historical significance of McCaffrey's 'Brainship Series' is usefully described by Amanda Jessica Salmonson as 'an example of transitional science fiction bridging masculine pulp sf to feminist authors of the middle and late '70s' (16). It was during the 1960s that McCaffrey produced a series of five novellas narrating the adventures of her cyborg Helva. Helva is a female who is born physically impaired and technologically adapted to spend the rest of her existence encapsulated within, but in control of, a spaceship. In these texts, McCaffrey creates a fictional universe called Central Worlds. It is a universe inhabited by technologically adapted humans known formally as 'shellpersons', but generally termed 'brains' because their 'neural synapses' are trained to maintain and run a spaceship. A 'brain's' body is kept alive by a complex life support system and through 'pituitary manipulation' their physiques are kept small, resembling 'mature dwarfs' (McCaffrey, Fantasy 36). Conditioned through 'shell psychology', these 'brains' learn how to accept their unusual physical existence of confinement and immobility, while understanding that their purpose is to work alongside a mobile partner, a scout, known as a 'softperson', but colloquially known as a 'brawn' (41).

## **Haraway and Other Critical Responses to The Cyborg in The Ship Who Sang**

In Haraway's revised 'Cyborg Manifesto', published in 1991, she argues that McCaffrey's disabled female protagonist merged with technology destabilises the gendered and sexed body:

Anne McCaffrey's pre-feminist *The Ship Who Sang* (1969) explored the consciousness of a cyborg, hybrid of girl's brain and complex machinery, formed after the birth of a severely handicapped child. Gender, sexuality and embodiment, skill: all were reconstituted in this story. (178)

Haraway recognises the disruptive potential of McCaffrey's cyborg protagonist to subvert gender hierarchies in western culture, which I will return to for further discussion later in this chapter. However, McCaffrey's representation of gender and disability in her Helva texts has received a range of critical responses. In relation to gender, the consensus among cultural and literary critics is that McCaffrey's female cyborg perpetuates gender stereotypes, promoting essentialist models of femininity (Balsamo 151; Gordon 194; Salmonson 15-18). For instance, Andrew Gordon claims that Helva, as a spaceship icon, represents the home with Helva fulfilling the feminine domestic image (194). Gordon concludes: 'In this respect, the collection can be criticised for concealing a traditional feminine role model' (196). In relation to disability, Jane Stemp's general complaint is that 'science fiction writers are remarkably uncreative when

imagining technology to empower people with disabilities' (4). In particular, McCaffrey is chastised for offering a sentimental representation of a disabled subject who is only valued because she is useful (4). Stemp does not clarify the meaning of this statement in her essay.

Rosemarie Garland Thomson explains that the sentimental representation of disability primarily functions as a 'spectacle to generate sympathy' for a disabled character (Garland Thomson, Extraordinary Bodies 81). In her analysis, Garland Thomson argues that although 'sentimental fiction seems to validate disabled figures', the disabled figure is actually used 'in the service of individualist ideology' (81). Here, Garland Thomson means that the convention of sentimentalism constructs 'the disabled figure as burdened by the limitations of individual embodiment, displacing these burdens from the liberal individual onto the distant other marked by visible body difference' (81). In brief, the disabled subject serves as a foil for the unlimited possibilities that are afforded the liberal subject. However, as I am about to argue, in the case of Helva, disability functions to underpin the limitations society places upon the female body at a moment when women desired freedom from constraints imposed upon their lives. Therefore, although the criticisms of McCaffrey's 'Brainship Series' that I have just discussed are to a certain extent valid, I will now offer an alternative interpretation of Helva's cyborg identity by firstly explaining the position of McCaffrey writing within the male dominated field of science fiction and, secondly, by analysing the way McCaffrey subversively appropriates conventional science fiction symbols and imagery for her own ends.

### **Helva: A Woman Constrained, Desiring to Break Free**

To begin, the criticism that Helva is a cyborg ‘concealing a traditional feminine role model’ fails to acknowledge the constraints publishers and editors imposed upon McCaffrey. McCaffrey was writing within what has been termed ‘the housewife’ genre where women writers were restricted to placing female characters in socially accepted gendered roles (Sargent 19). Although McCaffrey discusses in Reginold Bretnor’s Science Fiction: Today and Tomorrow (1974) that she desired to create characters that represented ‘liberated woman’, she was often asked to ‘define her [heroine] in terms of a customary womanly role’ (Sargent 18: McCaffrey, ‘Romance and Glamor in Science Fiction’ 282). This restricted McCaffrey in how she could represent her female characters, but I would argue that this also encouraged her to use science fiction genres creatively, subverting traditional gendered signifiers commonly used within science fiction literature. For instance, McCaffrey created her Helva stories by borrowing and combining conventional themes and tropes of the space opera genre, and inventively took what was traditionally understood to be a male adventure story and placed a female cyborg in the centre of the narrative.

Gary Westfahl argues that the space opera genre is defined by three characteristics: the first is the ‘space-ship’ that allows the reader to follow the adventures of a main protagonist as they embark upon journeys through uncharted realms, bringing humans into contact with strange worlds and alien ‘Others’; the second is the ‘yarn’ – an exciting adventure story that is filled with humans or alien spacefarers – some hostile, some friendly; and thirdly, the space opera is a genre that is regarded as low-brow, with formulaic plot lines and endless sequels. However, as Westfahl adds, historically, this critical disapproval of the

genre has usually meant that 'space opera must continually reinvent itself' (197-198). If Westfahl's definition of the space opera genre is considered, it is possible to argue that McCaffrey creatively uses the iconography of the spaceship to enable her physically impaired female character to journey through un-chartered realms, engage in interspecies contact and explore the implications of making a living in this make believe universe (197-198).

As an impaired female figure, immobile and confined within her spaceship, Helva may represent a woman in a traditionally feminine role. It is true that Helva, as a woman with a disability, is represented in a sentimental fashion and is only allowed to live because it is proven that she is useful to Central Worlds. However, Helva also represents a disabled woman, physically and socially enabled through technology. In her spaceship body, Helva is able to work and survive in the public and hostile environment of Central Worlds. Thomson has argued that sentimental fiction displaces the burden of the limited body onto the disabled subject, asserting the limitless possibilities of the liberal subject. However, in McCaffrey's 'Brainship Series', physical impairment is mapped onto the female body, illuminating how women share the social burden of disability.

Gwyneth Jones explains that historically in science fiction literature the icon of the rocket and the spaceship have embodied an 'ambivalent identity', representing both confinement and escape (164). Helva, in her cyborg guise as a spaceship, is an example of a trope in which women are discursively and socially constrained within patriarchal society but expressing a desire to break free. Although more powerful than any human, Helva is born into a world not of her own making, and her marginal identity as a 'Brainship' is decided for her. Helva is socialised and tutored through an expensive special school for 'shellpeople' in

order to perform a particular role. She is contracted to Central Worlds until she pays off her debt to them (McCaffrey, Fantasy 41; McCaffrey The Ship 19, 275). Throughout McCaffrey's Brainship narratives, Helva continuously strives to gain economic independence from Central Worlds while seeking acceptance for her unusual cyborg identity.

### **Helva: A Housewife in Space**

Helva's cyborg identity, connoting both the housewife and disabled woman confined within the home, may be a cultural association that remains problematic because it affirms gender roles. Therefore, it is important to briefly discuss both the conventional and subversive meanings this relationship generates. To begin with, as Garland Thomson explains in her essay 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory' (2002), the association of the housewife with the disabled subject is in the first instance a negative cultural concept:

A recent study on stereotyping showed that housewives, disabled people, blind people... and the elderly were all judged as being similarly incompetent. Such a study suggests that intensely normatively feminine positions – such as a housewife – are aligned with negative attitudes about people with disabilities. (5)

Despite this, there are connotations generated by the disabled female subject confined within the home that are both subversive and liberating and are in

keeping with Haraway's argument that women should embrace the possibilities that a cyborg identity embodies. For instance, McCaffrey's fiction creates the novel idea that a disabled female is perfect for the role of space traveller. Anita Silvers explains how novelty is a useful means for highlighting the 'deficiencies of normalcy' (238-239):

Novelty rather than normalcy, and uniqueness rather than typicality, are artistic desiderata. That singularity emancipates imagination and frees the exceptional individual from the expectations to which the group is held in artistic commonplace. To illustrate, this understanding was expressed in nineteenth century literature by the figure of the invalid. From Harriet Martineau's *Life in the Sickroom: Essays by an Invalid* (1844) to Charlotte Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865), confinement to the couch empowered women thus limited by freeing them from reproductive roles and thereby redefining their productivity as intellectual. (238-239)

Silver's argument for understanding the disabled female subject as a figure who creatively generates alternative feminine identities is applicable to McCaffrey's Helva. Helva, physically impaired and confined within her spaceship

body, also possesses a novel identity that promises to free her from social expectations that are associated with feminine ‘norms.’ Helva’s productivity is linked to her intellectual ability to control her spaceship body, outwit her foes and to think and act creatively and quickly in dangerous situations. Helva’s intellectual and technological ability is an important element that defines her status as a female cyborg in science fiction literature and is clearly outlined in detail in McCaffrey’s initial brainship story:

On the anniversary of her sixteenth year in a shell, Helva was unconditionally graduated and installed in her ship, the XH-834. Her permanent titanium shell was recessed behind an even more indestructible barrier in the central shaft of the scout ship. The neural, audio, visual and sensory connections were made and sealed...When she awoke, she *was* the ship. Her brain and intelligence controlled every function from navigation to such loading as a scout ship of her class needed. She could take care of herself and her ambulatory half, in any situation already recorded in the annals of Central Worlds and any situation its most fertile minds could imagine. (McCaffrey, Fantasy 39)



In this extract, Helva passes the rigorous tests that are set for a space traveller. Her body is indestructible and her intelligence controls the ship. The description of Helva's physical robustness and mental abilities is not incidental to the social context in which they were produced. As I have previously discussed, Helva is both physically and mentally capable of enduring prolonged 'confinement' and 'immobility', which her role as a 'brain' demands. Helva's capabilities reflect the qualities that were required of the ideal American astronaut. Initially, through rigorous testing, it was discovered that the ideal space traveller was like McCaffrey's Helva, a female. Testing began as a privately funded investigation into 'women's capabilities' to see whether women had anything to offer in terms of 'physical advantages for space flight' (Weitekamp 11). Unexpectedly, a portfolio of scientific evidence indicated that not only were women physically and mentally better suited to space travel than men, economically, they were a more viable candidate to send into space than men. As Margaret A. Weitekamp discusses:

In tests conducted in England, Canada, and the United States, women regularly outperformed men in enduring cramped spaces and prolonged isolation. [...] Moreover, women offered the same skills as men did, but in smaller physical packages since, on the average, women are lighter and shorter than men are. A smaller spacecraft for a smaller compact occupant would be

easier to engineer and less expensive to fly.

(Weitekamp 11)

However, despite these findings, in the popular press, the idea of women in space was presented as a problem. The general consensus indicated that in order for women to enter into the male domain of space travel, at best, they would have to lose their feminine traits, at worst, their biological make-up was re-presented as a hindrance, rather than an advantage, as previous scientific evidence and speculation initially implied (Weitekamp 11-12). During the early 1960s, when the presence of women astronauts threatened the superiority of the American male, both the frontier of space and the role of astronaut were constructed as specifically masculine preserves (Weitekamp 20). As a consequence, women were caught in a double bind. On the one hand, if women were to enter this male domain, their presence would conflict with their prescribed patriotic duty as wives and mothers in the American cause to fight against and eradicate communism. On the other hand, if a woman succeeded in becoming an astronaut, she would no longer be considered a woman, as defined by patriarchy. Moreover, if women could demonstrate that they could navigate and control a spaceship, the prestige of the astronaut would diminish, because if a woman could do it, then it would be considered that anyone could (Weitekamp 20-21). Weitekamp makes this clear when she cites Walter Cunningham, who explains how he and other astronauts enjoyed the star status 'as the John Waynes of the space frontier' (21). As Weitekamp explains, the status of the male astronaut had to be protected and this meant quite simply that 'astronauts could not be women' (21).

### **Cordwainer Smith's 'The Lady Who Sailed the Soul' (1960): Helen America, The Female 'Freak'**

This overt prejudice against women taking on the task of piloting a space ship is exemplified in Cordwainer Smith's science fiction short story 'The Lady Who Sailed The Soul' (1960). Set during a pioneering era of space travel in Smith's famously imagined future, 'The Instrumentality of Mankind', 'The Lady Who Sailed The Soul' appeared in the April edition of Galaxy Magazine in 1960, and is a satirical narrative presented as a love story. Presenting an unusual mother and daughter relationship, Smith's text combines concerns about a newly emerging feminist politics with a woman piloting a spaceship, representing both as an aberration. In Smith's text, female protagonist, Helen America, is the product of an unconventional mother. The mother becomes pregnant and refuses to name the father. Instead, she chooses to raise her daughter on her own. In her looks and social status, Helen America is blighted by her mother's unusual life: '[...] Helen America, she was a freak: but a nice one: a grim, solemn, sad, little brunette who had been born amid the laughter of humanity' (41). Nonetheless, as Smith describes, 'She was, however, a wonderful sailor' (41). Helen America is incredibly intelligent, but because of her marginal status, she decides to escape humanity by becoming a 'sailor', chartering ships across the vast expanse of the universe. In Smith's text, this is a radical decision for any human, because in order to become a 'sailor' and pilot a ship, the mind and body must be merged with technology. As a consequence, the individual is considered no longer human, because they have been dramatically altered into a cyborg.

Overall, Smith's narrative reflects contemporary views about women who do not conform to heteropatriarchal conventions. As I have argued in my

discussion of Moore's 'No Woman Born', once women step outside of their expected roles or refuse to align themselves with social expectations, they are incorporated into a discourse of disability and are regarded 'as freaks'. As in Smith's treatment of Helen America, ideologically and politically, she is a female situated outside of patriarchy's preferred ideal of womanhood and is therefore viewed as unfeminine. In a similar strategy to Moore, McCaffrey takes the trope of the aberrant woman and reconstructs her into a cyborg that is empowered by technology.

In the cultural climate in which McCaffrey was writing, where women could not be astronauts, she creates a female space traveller through the liminal and indeterminate guise of a cyborg. Like Smith's Helen America, McCaffrey's cyborg occupies an unusual public role in an imagined universe. Rather than being a figure of ridicule, as in Smith's text, McCaffrey's cyborg possesses an alternative feminine identity that is positive, promoting women as pioneers, who, although physically and socially constrained, contribute to society in novel ways. Indeed, Helva, confined to her space ship, does reflect patriarchy's social concept of woman confined to the home, bringing to mind the identity of the housewife and her essential reproductive role. At the same time, Helva is also inextricably linked to the radicalisation of the housewife and the emergence of proto-feminist ideas that encouraged women to look beyond the home and motherhood in pursuit of a career and even economic independence. In this respect, I would like to argue that the cyborg, as an image representing the housewife, is also an image representing the woman science fiction writer, namely Anne McCaffrey.

### **Helva: Anne McCaffrey's 'Alter Ego'**

When forging a career as a science fiction writer, McCaffrey was also a housewife and mother. While writing her Helva narratives, McCaffrey was a woman confined to the home, but she was also stepping outside of this traditional female domestic role in order to make her way into the male dominated world of science fiction literature. Robin Roberts draws attention to McCaffrey's claim that Helva is her 'alter ego' (Roberts, Anne McCaffrey 61). Roberts explores this claim by linking McCaffrey with Helva through their artistic talents, stating, 'Like Helva, McCaffrey was an actress, singer and performer. Helva is strong, admirable and powerful, like her creator' (Roberts, Anne McCaffrey 61). I expand on Roberts's analysis by arguing that Helva is a semi-autobiographical figure that reflects McCaffrey's ambitions as a science fiction writer in the 1960s. I consider that Helva represents McCaffrey's alter ego, with Central Worlds representing the science fiction community into which McCaffrey desired to escape and find success.

Writing science fiction narratives for a commercial audience offered McCaffrey a way to acquire economic independence. Through a fictional character, McCaffrey, I would argue, expresses her own very real desire to break free from her confined and constrained existence and gain economic independence. In this context, I propose that McCaffrey, as a science fiction writer, offers a representation of the feminine that is not the 'norm'. Rather than a woman narrowly defined through her reproductive role, McCaffrey redefines her productivity as intellectual through the act of science fiction writing. McCaffrey, like Helva, embodies the hybrid identity of the cyborg figure. From the marginal status associated with the housewife and the disabled subject, both Helva and

McCaffrey reflect the subversive cultural possibilities the cyborg figure promises by disrupting and denaturalising the narrow association of the feminine mind and body with that of a subordinate, weak and deficient female subject. Similar to Haraway's cyborg trope, Helva, both feminine and disabled, is a hybrid composed of marginal 'Others' and promises to be an empowering figure for both disabled and non-disabled women. It is in relation to the image of an empowered feminine 'Other' that I will now explore how McCaffrey's cyborg texts subvert gender relations as traditionally represented in science fiction literature.

### **Gender Conventions in Science Fiction**

In general, since the development of pulp science fiction in the mid 1920s, women have been represented as passive and expendable plot devices, a sexual spectacle to be rescued and to shore up the masculine status of the male hero, or to act as a sounding board to which male scientists explained their scientific theories (Attebery 45; Heldreth 209; McCaffrey, 'Romance and Glamour' 281). Arguing for the presence of strong, intelligent female characters in science fiction, this is a portrayal of women that McCaffrey found particularly irksome:

[...] in most of the '20s, '30s, and '40s, [...] women were generally relegated to the position of 'things', window-dressing, or forced to assume attitudes in the corner, out of the way. Woman as a valid character or, heaven forfend, protagonist was a *rara avis*. [...] The female often existed in the story of as

the straight ‘stupid’ off whom the Hero or the  
Good Scientist could bounce enough theory so  
that the dumbest male reader would understand  
the story’s science rationale. (McCaffrey,  
‘Romance and Glamour...’ 281)

As cited by Brian Attebery, examples of this can be found in the work of A. R. Long (a female writer who produced work within the conventions of male science fiction during this era) John Russel Fearn and Ralph Milne Farley (Attebery 45), where a daughterly figure often appears and functions as described by McCaffrey. In particular, the trope of the woman as a sounding board for enlightening the male reader takes on a more sinister turn in Tom Godwin’s ‘Cold Equations’ (1954), where a female stowaway on a spaceship threatens a mission to save a colony (Attebery 180).

In ‘Cold Equations’, the hero, who is the pilot of the ship, attempts to calculate a range of possibilities for accommodating his unexpected passenger, but the laws of physics provide a most unsatisfactory answer; the stowaway must be sacrificed in order for the mission to succeed. Throughout the text, the rationale for this sacrifice is made clear as mathematical calculations are explained to the stowaway, until finally she heroically agrees to ‘sacrifice her own life’ in order ‘to save others’ (Attebery 180). As Attebery explains, the story is ‘a tight little allegory about reason and sentiment’ (180), where a woman’s emotions (she wishes to visit her brother on a colony) are pitted against the harsh reality of the laws, or ‘Cold Equations’, that ‘govern the physical universe’ (48). Also, regardless of the fiction’s scientific accuracy, it is ‘a story that makes the reader

feel that he (using the gendered pronoun advisedly) is part of a technologically-minded elite, someone who can contemplate the real workings of the universe without fuzzy thinking or sentiment' (Attebery 48). Texts like those I have just described represent women as subordinate, weak, both mentally and physically, and moreover, they state that there is no place for women in the hostile, masculine environment of space.

### **The Subversion of Gender Conventions in McCaffrey's 'Brainship Series'**

The presence of Helva as a woman in space, I would argue, offers a subtle critique of these gendered tropes that govern and sustain the hierarchy of men and women in science fiction. For example, McCaffrey emphasises that although 'brawns' will compete with each other in an attempt to possess Helva, 'The ship always chose its own partner' (McCaffrey, *Fantasy* 40: Hudson Jones 204). When Helva chooses her first brawn, McCaffrey emphasises the ephemeral status of the human in relation to the cyborg and reverses the traditional gendered binary opposites by emphasising the superiority of the female brain over her male brawn:

Hers was a curious courtship – this would be  
only the first of several marriages for her, for  
brawns retired after 75 years of service, or  
earlier if they were unlucky. Brains, their  
bodies safe from any deterioration, served  
200 years, and were permitted to decide for  
themselves if they wished to continue.

(McCaffrey, *Fantasy* 41)



Compared to the cyborg, a ‘brawn’ is limited by his organic body. For example, during their final mission together, Helva’s brawn, Jennan, becomes trapped within the ship’s airlock along with the cloistered women he and Helva have just rescued. As they attempt to escape a supernova, the women panic because the heat of the blast penetrates the airlock and they begin to strike out at Jennan, resulting in his death:

One flailing arm became entangled in the  
leads to his power pack and the damage was  
quickly done. For all the power at her disposal,  
Helva was helpless. She watched as Jennan  
fought for his breath, as he turned his head  
beseechingly towards *her*, and died. (49)

The relationship between Helva and Jennan is important to McCaffrey for exploring a model promoting heterosexual equality. Helva falls in love with Jennan. However, McCaffrey, disposing of Jennan as he rescues a group of helpless women, not only puts into sharp contrast Helva’s feminine power against the fragility of her male partner within the hostile environment of space, but also dramatically subverts the traditional representation in science fiction of space opera’s all-powerful male hero, who more often than not is able to overcome any adverse situation or danger. In the setting of outer space, Helva is an impaired female enabled through a cyborg identity. Helva is more enduring and more powerful than any human. In comparison, the capacity of the human masculine

ideal epitomised by the ‘fine-looking, intelligent, well-coordinated and adjusted’ brawns of Central World is severely limited (41). Concurring with Haraway’s cyborg theory, McCaffrey’s cyborg promises to subvert representations that maintain bodies in their traditional cultural categories.

The colloquial term of brain and brawn both carry a subtext that is masculine. However, within the context of the 1960s debate about the female astronaut, who both mentally and physically outperformed her male counterparts, McCaffrey subversively reverses their gendered meanings. In McCaffrey’s series, the female ‘brain’ is technologically enhanced and linked to the invincible body of a spaceship, associating women and the feminine with strength and power. For instance, it is emphasised in the narrative that ‘she *was* the ship’ and while her ‘intelligence controlled every function’, she was also capable of taking ‘care of herself and her ambulatory half in any situation [...]’ (McCaffrey, *Fantasy* 39). In this respect, both in mind and body, Helva is a female subject that is superior to her male ‘brawn’. Additionally, while McCaffrey’s Helva reflects contemporary discourses on the abilities of the female astronaut, she also pre-empts Haraway’s proposal for a cyborg figure that disrupts gender hierarchies in western patriarchal language. Haraway argues that gendered dualisms in language perpetuate ‘practices of domination’ (177). For instance, in the tropes of western discourse, the mind is gendered as masculine, dominating and controlling the feminine body, signifying patriarchal control over the feminine ‘Other’ (Haraway 177). McCaffrey, like Moore and her protagonist Deidre, constructs Helva as a female cyborg with an ego and mind of her own. In McCaffrey’s texts, Helva is a feminine icon indicating women’s desire to have and maintain control over their own bodies. Helva, like Moore’s cyborg Deidre, is not interested in dominating or

being dominated by others, but instead seeks to build alliances and establish equal relationships (McCaffrey, The Ship 268-269). As I have discussed, McCaffrey is also keen to establish and emphasise the superior qualities of her female cyborg hero.

In contrast to her relationship with male brawns, Helva's adventures with female brawns are somewhat different creating an interdependent relationship that ensures her female partner's survival. In her third 'Brainship' novella 'The Ship Who Killed', originally published in Galaxy Science Fiction, October 1966, Helva is temporarily teamed up with female medical officer Kira of Canopus. Kira is a skilled human embryologist. Together, Helva and Kira are sent on a mission delivering 'embryo-banks' to sterilised planets in the star system of Nekkar. McCaffrey has received criticism over how she has represented female characters in her Helva series. In fact, her work has been charged with being 'backward in its images of women' (Salmonson 16). For instance, Jessica Amanda Salmonson criticises McCaffrey for essentialising the roles of her two female protagonists:

Kira, we're told, achieved her position only  
because her occupation is regarded as a  
woman's field; fetal children are a woman's  
business. The protagonist [Helva] observes,  
"Central Worlds might be relying on her  
maternal instinct as additional insurance for  
the mission." McCaffrey's future believes  
men lack parental abilities inherent in  
women. (15)

It is true to say that within this particular narrative, Kira and Helva are two women who are represented through the tropes of motherhood. Roberts considers that Kira and Helva affirm the feminine values of mothering arguing that ‘McCaffrey depicts mothering as not only a biological act of bearing a child, but also the even more important act of nurturing’ (Roberts, Anne McCaffrey 67). However, I consider that McCaffrey offers an image of women in control of reproductive technology. It has to be remembered that it was during the 1960s that the oral contraceptive pill was introduced to North American women and became widely used. For the first time, women were using technology that allowed them to take control over their own bodies and reproductive cycles (FDA 1). Helva’s relationship to her cargo is circumscribed by her affinity with technology, not with any naturalised notion of the feminine and the organic body of the mother. For instance, Helva in her guise as a spaceship, acting as a surrogate body transporting ‘30 000 fetuses’ makes it clear that ‘the affinity’ she feels towards her unusual passengers was first and foremost ‘a shell reaction’ (McCaffrey, Galaxy 88). As McCaffrey explains: ‘They were after all, encapsulated as she was, the difference being that they would one day burst from their scientific husks, as she never could nor even desired to’ (88).

Helva’s cyborg identity disrupts the essential link patriarchal society makes between woman’s biology and reproduction. Helva’s and Kira’s bodies are disconnected from their ‘inevitable’ biological and social roles as mothers and are instead aligned with what is traditionally considered to be a masculine position of control over women’s bodies and their capacity to reproduce. At the same time, rather than occluding ideas concerned with motherhood and mothering, McCaffrey, through Helva’s internal thoughts, conveys to the reader in some

detail the reproductive possibilities open to women through advances made in genetics. Here, Helva offers a monologue that includes speculation on the possibility of women bearing and rearing children in the absence of men: ‘On an individual basis, the young wife, untimely widowed, might bear her husband’s children from his seed on file at the RCA [The Race Conservation Agency]’ (McCaffrey, Galaxy 84).

McCaffrey discusses a technology that de-naturalises reproduction, questioning the need for heterosexual family units that are headed by a figure representative of patriarchal values. For instance, Helva offers herself as an analogy for single parenthood through her own ‘unnatural’ role as a surrogate mother:

‘After all,’ the ship chuckled, ‘there aren’t many women,’ and Helva used the word proudly, knowing that she has passed as surely from girlhood to woman’s estate as any of her mobile sisters, ‘who give birth to 110,000 babies at one time.’ (McCaffrey, Galaxy 115)

Here, McCaffrey uses imagery connoting the hive mother common in science fiction narratives that evoke male fears about women’s reproductive powers. However, I would argue that rather than merely reducing women’s biological and social expectations to the role of mother, McCaffrey offers a subtle comment on how such an association becomes ambiguous when technology disrupts hetero-patriarchal values and ‘norms.’ Therefore, I would argue that McCaffrey plays

with de-essentialising the category ‘woman’, as it is defined within patriarchal conventions.

This attempt to represent ‘woman’ beyond her reproductive role is an alternative vision to how women were imagined in male centred science fiction literature of previous decades. In these narratives, male writers frequently returned to the image of the mother figure. For instance, a recurring popular male fantasy and trope from the science fiction pulp magazines of the 1940s and 1950s was the female alien. Robin Roberts explains that in the writing and the artwork of these popular magazines, there emerged a fascination with female sexual and reproductive powers portraying women as mythically and physically enlarged. However, as female alien ‘Others’, they were also removed from humanity and the male hero. Setting the socio-political scene, Roberts suggests reasons for this phenomenon:

The sudden reemergence of female aliens  
in the science fiction pulps during this time  
may well have been a by-product of the  
post-World War II glorification of femininity.  
The exodus of women from the factories  
reflects a dual anxiety about “unnatural”  
women like Bulwer-Lyton’s formidable  
female aliens, who dominate the public world,  
and the psychological power women could wield  
as rulers of the domestic sphere, as the Angels  
of the House. (Roberts, A New Species 42)

These female alien ‘Others’ were written and depicted as towering over, threatening, or cradling in their arms the male hero. In this familial drama, the male protagonist eventually overpowers the mother figure. Human male identity is destabilised and threatened, only to become stable again and reassured, as technology is turned against woman in order to control her overpowering reproductive nature (Roberts, A New Species 48-50). As Roberts points out this misogyny is ‘rooted in “the force of the idea of *dependence on a woman for life itself*,” and the ‘son’s constant effort to assimilate, compensate for or deny the fact that he is ‘of woman born’’ (50). In these misogynistic endings, powerful women are brought down to size, often destroyed or alternatively destroy themselves thus preserving the patriarchal order (Roberts, A New Species 56). Similarly to the female alien of the 1950s, Helva is physically and mythically enlarged in her spaceship body as ‘The Ship Who Sang’. As a female cyborg, she is ‘Other’ to humanity and the male hero. However, rather than performing the function of a 1950s trope whereby the male hero, in control of technology, overpowers an overwhelmingly feminine nature, Helva in comparison does not embody nature but instead is aligned with technology and is rewarded for her capabilities.

### **Helva and Haraway’s Cyborg Theory: Utopian Visions of Female Empowerment and Gender Equality**

In light of these representations, it may be argued that McCaffrey’s Helva evokes the concepts Haraway expresses in her ‘Cyborg Manifesto.’ Haraway suggests that the cyborg, a construct of both human and machine, is a trope that carries the potential to disrupt the patriarchal myth of origins that socially and culturally subordinates and damages women (150-151). As Haraway states, ‘The

cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project' (151). Here, Haraway means that the cyborg, an amalgamation of both self and 'Other', circumvents conventional hierarchical gender values that emerge from familial relations in western culture. As I have already argued, Helva makes it clear that the affinity she feels towards her cargo of foetuses is that of a 'shellperson,' a technologically constructed hybrid 'Other' encoded as feminine. Helva represents woman aligned with the feminine and technology. It is an empowering image because it asks the question: What happens to the status of woman when she breaks away from patriarchal narratives that promote the individuation of the subject centred around a myth of origins and organic wholeness? In Helva's identity, it is difference defined through technology and the feminine that builds alliances between communities and individuals, not organic wholeness. Organic wholeness is centred upon the father, which ultimately, as Haraway argues, defines difference through a 'drama of escalating domination of woman/nature' (151). As Robin Roberts usefully explains, 'Through the patterns of science fiction, women writers create worlds and even universes of their own. They ask us to imagine a utopian future in which women can control their own bodies, and in which men and women are equal' (Roberts, Anne McCaffrey 19).

In relation to the differences that exist between women, McCaffrey also promotes an equal alliance between the confined and immobile Helva and her mobile partner Kira. It has to be remembered that McCaffrey was writing within the genre of the space opera. This meant that drama, action and tension are necessary pre-requisites for enhancing the heroic figure of the central protagonist who, when faced with danger, is nevertheless able to overcome obstacles, resolve



problems and most importantly live to fight another day. As I have already argued, the central protagonist is usually a male action figure; however, in McCaffrey's narrative, featuring Kira, the action figure is female. Salmonson may have criticised McCaffrey for giving women traditional roles, but in the 'The Ship Who Killed,' McCaffrey's women also embark on a treacherous journey more traditionally befitting a male adventure story. For example, Helva and Kira are diverted by a mayday distress call to a planet called Alioth. There they come across an all male religious sect, who, intoxicated by the hallucinogenic gases emitted from the planet's volcanic activity, appear to be worshipping a female deity. In order to investigate the problem, it is necessary for Kira to leave the ship. Helva gives Kira a contact button, allowing constant visual and verbal communication between the immobile cyborg and the mobile human. Helva relinquishes some of her power to Kira, who although in danger, is empowered as she leaves the protective interior of Helva's spaceship body. Helva and Kira are separated, but they are also connected, forming an interdependent relationship between a disabled and non-disabled woman, becoming what may be described as another cybernetic system. In familial terms, this relationship may even be read as representing a symbiotic relationship between mother and daughter. Therefore, in partnership, they discover the terrible secret of Alioth.

Helva and Kira receive a signal from Alioth requesting a substantial amount of fetuses (McCaffrey, Galaxy 98). On arrival, they encounter a brainship that has crashed on the planet. Buried nose-down in an old volcanic eruption is 'Brainship' SL-732, a partnership that consisted of Lia and the brawn Seber. Lia's brawn, Seber, is dead and she in turn has tried to kill herself. Insane with grief, the brainship is calling to the inhabitants of Alioth to join her in death

(107, 109). To end this pathetic scene of self-destruction and misery, Helva and Kira work together to kill the rogue ship:

And Helva, knowing she was in effect  
executing one of her own kind, broadcast  
the release word to the 732. As the syllables  
with their pitched nuances activated the  
release panel, Kira caught the plate, reached  
in deftly and threw the valve that would flood  
the inside of the shell with anesthesia. (111-112)

In order to do this, Kira is placed in a position of grave danger. Realising that Kira is about to perform a sacrilegious act, she is attacked by the inhabitants of Alioth. At that moment, Kira turns into an archetypal all action male hero: 'Her swift hand caught one on the voice box in a deadly chop. She ducked under the other man, using her body to throw him against the bier so squarely that his head cracked ominously against the stone, and he slumped down' (111). Kira is able to perform her task, make her getaway and find her way back to the safety of Helva's spaceship, before the planet starts to erupt (113). In this exciting tale, Helva and Kira are like the male heroes of earlier stories. This time, however, Helva and Kira are the ones in control of technology, working together to outwit and outmanoeuvre those who present them with obstacles, and are enabled to resolve and survive dangerous situations.

The violent act of expunging a female 'Other' remains problematic. However, the killing of this self- destructive brainship needs to be considered in

relation to the science fiction magazines of the 1940s and 1950s. As Roberts explains, in these texts 'women's self-abnegation is presented as admirable', maintaining 'a patriarchal symbolic order in which the maternal is expected to destroy itself to preserve the patriarchy' (Roberts, A New Species 42). In contrast to the suicidal brainship, Helva, who is also mourning her dead brawn, is stronger and is willing to work through her grief. Helva's life is not subordinated to the life of her male brawn. Instead Helva goes on to have more adventures and do more daring deeds. In addition, the relationship developed between women in McCaffrey's cyborg texts, as demonstrated here, offers an empowering image of the feminine for both the disabled and non-disabled reader.

I would argue that where Helva is enabled through technology, the men who come and go in Helva's life are like the women represented in the masculine science fiction pulp magazines and novels of previous decades. They are physically vulnerable and unstable entities - love objects in need of rescue, but for dramatic effect are also expendable. In McCaffrey's narratives, the female brawns that Helva encounters are represented as strong characters and are often defined by their longevity, or by their ability to survive tough situations. In contrast, as Roberts points out, Helva's 'male partners die or retire' (Roberts, A New Species 99). Throughout the Helva narratives, McCaffrey provides the reader with recurring images of men growing old, physically degenerating, deteriorating or decomposing, succumbing to disease, developing neuroses, or becoming psychotic. McCaffrey defines physical vulnerability and weakness through the human status of a masculine organic body, while positioning the hybrid feminine cyborg as empowered. McCaffrey reverses and de-naturalises gender hierarchies of masculine/feminine, culture/nature, ability/disability, by physically and socially

empowering Helva within the hostile environment of Central Worlds, while men are reminded of their biological limitations. Overall, in order to reconstruct a more egalitarian relationship between women and men, McCaffrey's texts deconstruct traditional gendered tropes in her narratives, offering a critique of gendered relations within society.

### **Beyond the Body: Technologies of The Voice and Gender Performance**

The Helva narratives suggest the disruptive potential of a cyborg identity upon conventional heteropatriarchal ideas that define gender and sexuality. A particular feature that assists in sustaining Helva's liminal identity is her voice. Similarly to C.L. Moore's Deidre, Helva is a physically impaired female whose brain exists within a prosthetic body, which in her case happens to be a spaceship. She has learned, like Deidre, how to develop her voice with the assistance of technology. Equally, Helva is also like Kuttner's cyborg protagonist Bart, in that her brain (and body) are concealed within a titanium shell, hidden within the ship's structure. Helva's vocal presence is marked by a bodily absence, allowing her to not only define a feminine identity unique to her self, but also to repeatedly demonstrate that she is able to perform and mimic other voices of either sex (McCaffrey, *Fantasy* 39) – an ability which is established in McCaffrey's early Helva story 'The Ship Who Sang':

She [Helva] found herself able to sing any  
role and any song which struck her fancy.  
It would not occur to her that it was curious  
for a female to sing bass, soprano and

coltura as she pleased. It was to Helva only  
a matter of the correct reproduction and  
diaphragmic control required by the music  
attempted. (39)

As Roberts has argued, throughout the Helva narratives, her voice is a source of power, which helps her overcome adversity (Roberts, Anne McCaffrey 65-66). In this respect, Helva's voice is a powerful feminine tool marking her presence as a woman empowered by cyborg technology. However, it is also a feminine tool that can disturb gender and sexual identity, which leads me to return to Haraway's claim that in McCaffrey's cyborg novel The Ship Who Sang: 'Gender, sexuality and embodiment, skill: all were reconstituted in this story' (Haraway 178). What Haraway means here is that Helva, through the disruptive influence of the disabled body upon her gendered identity, is a cyborg that has the potential to de-naturalise patriarchal discourses that impose a causal link between the biological body, gender and sex.

This potential to confuse and invert gender and sexual identity, through the cyborg figure, pervades McCaffrey's 1969 Hugo award-winning novella 'Dramatic Mission', which focuses upon Helva's unusual vocal abilities. In 'Dramatic Mission', Central Worlds accidentally encounter an alien species called the Beta Corviki, who, on contact, discover that earth possess a cultural commodity that provides a valuable source of energy for them. As it is explained to Helva: 'According to the Survey Captain, the Corviki were entranced with the concept of special 'formulae' – the crew had been watching 'Othello' – intending purely to *waste* energy in search of excitation and recombination with no mass

objective' (McCaffrey, Analog 66). Consequently, Helva is chartered to take a group of actors to the planet Beta Corvi, in order to perform the Shakespearean play *Romeo and Juliet*, because '*Romeo and Juliet* was a sample of the merchandise which has aroused the Corviki curiosity' (78). In exchange for this service, the Corviki's will give Central Worlds valuable 'scientific information' - information that will significantly advance Central Worlds space technology (52, 62).

As Helva journeys through space towards Beta Corvi, the acting troupe discovers that she possesses unique vocal abilities. For instance, in one scene, Helva helps out in their rehearsals by interjecting and performing the role of the Shakespearean male character, Benvolio. Significantly, in the play, Benvolio is a loyal friend and peacemaker to Romeo and his family, reflecting Helva's diplomatic role as a mediator between Central Worlds and the Corviki. When she is asked whether she can switch her voice at will, Helva replies: 'Well, it is only a question of projection, you know. And since my voice is reproduced through audio units, I can select the one proper for the voice register required' (McCaffrey, Analog 68). Helva's vocal versatility becomes increasingly useful to the troupe as they continue to rehearse the play. At the same time, Helva's voice disturbs her feminine identity and has the potential to uncouple gender from the biology of the female subject. Signifying the polymorphous possibilities of Helva's cyborg identity, one actor declares: 'You could be the whole damn play all by yourself' (83). Helva's voice connects her emotionally to humans, breaking down prejudicial barriers that emerge when humans encounter her unusual cyborg identity. At the same time, McCaffrey is keen to emphasise that Helva's voice is a technological achievement rather than a natural consequence of her gender

identity. Through her gender performance, Helva disrupts her gender and sexual identity.

### **Indeterminate Identities, Alternate Possibilities**

In the novel's version of 'Dramatic Mission', Helva's indeterminate cyborg identity is developed and explored further through the alternate possibility of re-embodiment. For instance, in order for the acting troupe to perform their play in the Corviki environment, they are required to undergo a 'psyche transfer'. Helva, who is assigned to protect her crew and retrieve valuable data from the Corviki, is also required to do the same (McCaffrey, Analog 78). This 'psyche transfer' involves the transference of an individual's brain patterns into what is described as an 'empty envelope', awaiting them on Beta Corvi ( 61). The concept of transferring minds into alien bodies allows McCaffrey to explore what happens to gender and sexual identity when appearance is removed or altered. For instance, it is made clear early in the narrative that 'on Beta Corvi, external appearances will not matter. Ability will' (61). The Corviki species are likened to a particular marine animal known as hydrozoa (85). Hydrozoa are sea creatures such as jellyfish that possess gender and sexual identities that can change according to environmental conditions. This analogy, suggestive of the transitory nature of Corviki identity, is significant because the idea that gender can change according to external environmental conditions reflects changing attitudes towards gender and sexual identities at the time.

As I have suggested in the Introductory Chapter, the cyborg anticipates queer theory. The politics of queer theory is concerned with highlighting that the relationship between biology, gender, sex and desire is unstable in order to argue

that identity is not fixed but that it is historically and culturally constructed and is always in process and subject to change. When Helva and her entourage are transferred into the 'homogenous shape' of the Corviki envelope, they are seduced by the possibilities of existing in a Corviki environment. In their new guise, they adapt to and adopt the role of the Corviki, which, as Helva describes, is 'Like assuming the characteristics of the part you're playing' (McCaffrey, Analog 89). In the case of the Corviki, the part requires that 'feelings' are exchanged through the transmission and reception of psychic energy (86). It is an act that renders the physical boundaries of the human body and human identity, usually defined through biology, gender and sex, redundant. For some of Helva's entourage, the liberation from their human and physical constraints proves too seductive as they begin to 'express themselves in Corviki terms' (89). In brief, they do not just play the role of the Corviki but become Corviki. As Helva observes, she herself was experiencing 'a split of personality' between Helva and her 'imprinted self in the Corviki envelope' (89). The splitting of the psyche and the creation of other selves refutes essentialist ideas about identity as innate and unchangeable. Instead, Helva's encounter with an alien species and culture points to the fact that identities are fluid and are continuously made and unmade in relation to shifting environmental factors.

Through the 'homogenous shape' of the Corviki, McCaffrey presents a utopian environment where everyone is physically the same but where that physicality is not what defines a person's identity. At the same time, McCaffrey refuses to elide the problem of physical difference that mark her cyborg protagonist out as 'Other' to the human male. In this context, I would argue that McCaffrey's text conveys a political comment, claiming that ability should always



circumvent cultural prejudices that emerge because of difference. In 'Dramatic Mission', this is emphasised when some of the actors, freed from the limitations of their human form, choose to stay with the Corviki, leaving their 'bodies' behind on board Helva. The bodies that are left are both female and male, and Helva, her brain already altered in order to achieve the 'psyche transfer' is given the chance to live out the rest of her life in any body she chooses. The reason given to Helva is that, in a mobile body, she will benefit, by attaining 'physical movement' and therefore, 'physical freedom' (McCaffrey, The Ship Who Sang 228).

In response to this suggestion, Helva makes it clear that: 'As this ship, I have more physical power, more physical freedom, than you ever will know' (229-230). Helva insists on remaining a cyborg. This, I would argue, is evidence that McCaffrey, through her cyborg protagonist, is staking a claim for women to define a feminine identity for themselves - an identity that challenges patriarchy's desire to control women through prescribed gender norms that disenfranchise and discourage women from pursuing a life beyond the domestic sphere. For instance, towards the end of the 1960s McCaffrey's Helva narratives are marked by her ability to divorce unsuitable brawns, acquiring economic independence and finally, liberation. In her brainship series, McCaffrey makes it clear that brains are allowed to divorce brawns if they find their partnership unsatisfactory.

### **Divorce and Economic Independence: Escaping Oppression and Starting Anew**

In the short story 'The Ship Who Disappeared' (1969), Helva's involvement with her chosen brawn Teron of Achion is a total disaster. Teron is a bully and fails to trust Helva's power, skills and expertise in her role as a

‘brainship.’ For Teron, brainships are ‘unreliable organisms’ that need human guidance (McCaffrey, If 48-49). In comparison, Teron is described as an automaton who unquestioningly follows orders from those in authority, leading Helva to conclude that Teron ‘had experienced no *human* emotions in his life’ (49). Teron’s appalling attitude towards Helva’s status as a brainship eventually places not only himself but also Helva in extreme danger, resulting in Helva being captured and tortured by a villain named Xixon. In this narrative, McCaffery emphasises the importance of Helva’s technological ability. Losing control over her own body and the technology that empowers and sustains Helva is the outcome of Teron’s arrogance and a desire to control her. Ultimately, Teron’s psychological bullying endangers Helva’s mental and physical well being, leading her to finally divorce him. The price for divorcing a brawn is costly, and Helva has to pay a ‘cancellation penalty’ for the pleasure of ridding herself of a troublesome brawn (McCaffrey, Analog 50) .

This process of divorce, increased empowerment and economic independence at such a moment in McCaffrey’s narratives parallel her own life events, and is pertinent to women and the developments taking place in American society at the time. As Elaine Tyler May points out, ‘The divorce rate, after more than a decade of stability, began to rise gradually in the early sixties and then dramatically in the late sixties, skyrocketing to unprecedented heights in the early 1970s’ (198). As Tyler May goes on to discuss, although divorce presented greater financial problems for women, it was a way to escape ‘oppressive or even brutal marriages’ (200). McCaffrey has commented upon how she endured the psychological bullying from a husband who thought little of her involvement in science fiction writing (Roberts, Anne McCaffrey 3, 7). For McCaffrey, and

mirroring the achievements of Helva, her financial security and chance for a life independent from an abusive marriage improves. It was at the end of the 1960s, when McCaffrey had established an economically viable career as a writer that she divorced her husband and moved to Ireland with her children. Just like Helva, McCaffrey becomes empowered, gains economic independence, and takes control of her life, starting anew under her own terms.

In the case of Helva, her new start in life involves finding her perfect brawn, Niall Parallon. While this may be read as a repositioning of Helva in the role of a helpmate to yet another brawn (Balsamo 151), Niall is unlike the other brawns of Central Worlds. To begin with, he is diminutive in size, possessing the physical stature of a dwarf (McCaffrey, The Ship 279). Niall's physical difference to other brawns is significant. McCaffrey, I would argue, chooses to express a desire for equal gender relations between Helva and Niall through the trope of 'Otherness'. For instance, Helva's own organic body has been 'manipulated' by Central Worlds in order to remain physically dwarf-like and McCaffrey, within the text, discursively 'manipulates' the physical stature of Helva's ideal brawn. Just as Helva is 'Other' to the human, Niall is 'Other' to the conventional masculine traits that define Central Worlds' male brawn. Niall is 'dwarfed' by other men (McCaffrey, The Ship 279), his standard regulation suit is tailored to fit his 'short, well-proportioned body' (171); Niall is not big enough to pass the 'image requirements' of the 'tall' brawns that Central Worlds prefer to recruit (270). However, as Helva asserts, Niall would make a 'good brawn' and what he lacks in 'stature' he makes up in 'mass...and pure cussedness' (270). Within the context of an emerging feminism, The Ship Who Sang subtly provides an alternative to gender stereotypes through the unusual alliance between a female

cyborg and a diminutive male brawn. Overall, McCaffrey subverts hierarchies of domination between women and men, by aligning her female 'brain' with a male 'brawn', through the trope of physical difference and 'Otherness'.

### **The Limitations of McCaffrey's Cyborg**

McCaffrey's treatment of an equal gender alliance between Helva and Niall unfortunately weakens the empowering hybrid image that her cyborg initially promised for both disabled and non-disabled women. Niall's relationship with Helva involves an element of romance that introduces into the narrative a discourse on physical beauty, which not only serves to undermine Helva's cyborg abilities, but which also threatens to exclude and subordinate the disabled subject that is an important part of Helva's cyborg identity. Helva's abilities are the outcome of a disabled, female body merged with technology - an identity that has the potential to disrupt conventional gender relations between women and men, as well as forge an equal alliance between different women. However, this is undone through a conventional male fantasy about the ideal woman. To explain further, Niall develops a fixation on Helva, a psychological condition usually experienced by brawns. 'A brawn's irrational desire to see the face of his "brain" partner was scarcely uncommon when there was a deep emotional attachment between partners' (McCaffrey, The Ship 306-307). McCaffrey has been criticised for bringing into the narrative the idea of the 'chromosomal extrapolation'. A chromosomal extrapolation is a visual representation of a brain constructed from its genetic coding, indicating what the character's would have looked like if they had not been born with a physical impairment (Stemp 4). Although brains are not encouraged to seek out this alternative perfect self-image, brawns are often

tempted to satisfy their 'fixation' by having such an image constructed of their brain partner. It is a temptation that Niall is unable to resist and Helva, through the simulacrum of a chromosomal extrapolation, is represented as a perfect and beautiful woman. In comparison, Helva's organic and impaired self could never live up to such an ideal.

Rosmarie Garland Thomson usefully identifies the historical emergence of a feminine signifier in nineteenth-century American literature, which is the transcendental image of the beautiful heroine surpassing the limitations of her physical body (Garland Thomson, Extraordinary Bodies 98-99). McCaffrey, I would argue, uses this trope to signify Helva's success, introducing a hierarchy between disabled and non-disabled subjectivities, which, in this final scenario, Helva embodies. Therefore, despite the fact that Helva has proven abilities, McCaffrey undermines these abilities, by introducing the trope of the beautiful woman. The contradictions surrounding Helva's cyborg character reflect the difficult position that women find themselves in when pursuing a career in a male dominated occupation. If successful, women are judged only in physical terms, diminishing their intellectual and physical abilities. This is exemplified in the case of Geraldine Cobb who, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, surpassed male astronauts in scientific tests, which brought her to the attention of the media. As Weitekamp explains: 'The *Washington Star* covered the news as if Cobb had won a beauty contest, not passed astronaut tests, reporting in detail on her weight and proportions' (13). However, while some forms of reportage exaggerated feminine gender traits, others 'offered a profile [of the ideal female astronaut] that focused on minimizing female traits' (Weitekamp 12). For instance, a requirement in a 1959 LOOK magazine cover story established that a female astronaut should be

‘flat chested’ which was reiterated later in the text, emphasising ‘She will not be bosomy’ (Weitekamp 12). Overall, with regards to the prospect of a female space traveller, femininity was either exaggerated in order to diminish the achievement of female participants, or, in a discourse that constructed an ideal image of the astronaut the physical traits that marked the presence of the woman were used to negate her.

Similarly, although I consider that the cyborg figure circumvents the negation of woman, the problems of placing a woman in an unconventional gender role are present in McCaffrey’s novel. When viewed as a physically impaired subject, technologically adapted and enabled to survive the hostile conditions of space Helva, as I have argued, is a role model for women whose bodies have historically and socially been marginalised in western discourses. When McCaffrey displaces Helva’s cyborg figure with an idealised image of femininity, through the ‘chromosomal extrapolation’, McCaffrey endorses an unequal hierarchy of difference between the feminine and disabled body. In this scenario, the feminine identity of the cyborg becomes a possibility for liberation from gender constraints as well as having the potential to divide women. As Anne Hudson Jones has commented: ‘The question left unanswered is what [Niall] Parallon would have done had he discovered from the extrapolation that Helva was not beautiful’ (205). In order to accommodate the success of a female protagonist according to the values of patriarchy, McCaffrey unfortunately uses a literary device that, in the final instance, de-values the presence of the disabled woman.

To conclude, on one level, McCaffrey inventively incorporates themes, images and tropes from the space opera genre and re-imagines the feminine as a

technologically-friendly self, building alliances and negotiating new relations between women and men through her cyborg text. McCaffrey's female cyborg is an example of how a woman writer drew upon conventional narratives in order to rewrite endings that kept women at the centre of the action. However, McCaffrey's plot device of the 'chromosomal extrapolation', distancing Helva's deformed body from a feminine ideal of physical beauty, creates an oppressive hierarchy between women and able and disabled subjects. Haraway promotes the cyborg as a trope for creating discursive alliances between marginalised 'Others,' but Haraway also emphasises the responsibility women must take when intervening in dominant and oppressive discourses (150). As Haraway states, her 'Cyborg Manifesto' 'is an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction' (150). Helva, the mechanical woman, is indeed a figure that revels in her affinity with technology, taking pleasure in abilities normally denied women in science fiction. At the same time, McCaffrey's physically impaired female is a trope representing women constrained by patriarchal society. Nonetheless, bodily impairment is also a negative connotation that can divide women coerced by myths of beauty signifying feminine success. McCaffrey is a female science fiction writer who has used the representation of disability in order to generate narratives that provoke thought about women desiring self-determination and equality in society. In the context of an era defined by space travel and unlimited technological progress, McCaffrey, like Moore promotes the (r)evolutionary possibilities of a woman engaged with, and enhanced by, technology. Nonetheless, in the Helva texts, the differences that exist between women, an issue that is raised through the disabled body, remain unresolved, and in the final instance, elided.

## **Section Two**

### **Cynical Cyborgs: Shifting (A)Genders**



### **Chapter 3**

#### **James Tiptree's 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1973)**

In this next chapter, I will continue to explore the problematic relationship between the female subject, the disabled body and technology raised in McCaffrey's cyborg text, by analysing the work of Alice B. Sheldon, who wrote under the male pseudonym, James Tiptree, Jr. The text I will focus upon will be her Hugo award-winning novella 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1973), a narrative about a physically impaired woman named Philadelphia Burke, who is used to remotely control the artificial body of a beautiful female celebrity called Delphi. Tiptree's cyborg text will be read within the political and social context of the 1970s and second wave feminism. In this context, I will offer an original analysis of 'The Girl Who...' that identifies and explores the inter-textual relationship between Shulamith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex and Tiptree's short story. In contrast to the optimistic tone of McCaffrey's work, I begin by explaining that Tiptree's portrayal of women's relationship with technology has a more cynical outlook that reflects both her response to feminist criticism of women's subordination within a patriarchal system, as well as her own personal view of the way women are divided by patriarchal technology.

Similar to McCaffrey's Helva, Tiptree's protagonist constructs the binary divide of the imperfect/perfect body through the hybrid identity of the cyborg. For instance, Jane Donawerth points out that Philadelphia Burke represents 'the innately defective woman who must construct her beauty through consumerism' (65). Unlike McCaffrey's Helva, however, Philadelphia Burke does not transcend her physical limitations through an idealised image of woman. Instead, as

Donawerth argues, Tiptree's plot serves to critique 'woman programmed to her social role as consumer' and to 'expose the nature of romance also as social conditioning' (66). I wish to expand on this idea by demonstrating that 'The Girl Who...' is a revision of the traditional science fiction mechanical woman narrative.

In science fiction the image of the mechanical woman is a popular trope that expresses male fears and desires about technology. She is represented as beautiful, obedient and controllable. Often the mechanical woman falls in love with the man who has made her, affirming his mastery over the feminine and technology. Additionally, the mechanical woman becomes a devoted helper to her male creator, maintaining woman's inferior and subservient position within the matrix of heteropatriarchy. An early example of the mechanical woman narrative, which I will return to later in this chapter, is Lester Del Ray's 'Helen O'Loy' (1938). 'Helen O'Loy' tells the story of two scientists who create the perfect woman: she falls in love with her maker and stays loyal to him until his death (Del Ray 64-65). In essence, the merging of machine with the female body is a reassuring fantasy expressing both fears and desires about male control over technology and women.

Tiptree's text appropriates the trope of the mechanical woman, offering a critique of patriarchal structures that use technology to perpetuate idealised images that persuade women to collude in their own oppression through aspiring to perfect femininity. In this discussion, I explore the deconstruction/reconstruction of gender through the female cyborg figure and I offer an extensive analysis of the oppressive cult of beauty in patriarchal culture. Here, the significance of the dual identity of woman in Tiptree's cyborg text is explained through the juxtaposition

of physical impairment with physical perfection. Finally, I provide an original interpretation of ‘The Girl Who...’ as a text that subversively queers the mechanical woman narrative by re-reading the cyborg coupling of Philadelphia Burke and Delphi as an allegory of Tiptree’s repressed same-sex desires.<sup>11</sup> However, to introduce Tiptree, I will start by explaining her relationship with second wave feminism.

### **James Tiptree, Jr. and Second Wave Feminism**

Keeping her identity secret, Tiptree engaged in a feminist dialogue with fellow writers such as Joanna Russ. This was her attempt to understand the political attitudes that were emerging in science fiction literature during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Phillips 301-307). While Tiptree was beginning to consider feminism and how it could inform her writing, Russ had already proposed a political literary strategy, encouraging women to look to a genre that in terms of style and creativity had become exhausted (Luckhurst 180). In two influential essays, ‘The Wearing Out of Genre Materials’ (1971), and ‘Why Women Can’t Write’ (1971), Russ argued that despite the fact that science fiction literature was no more than ‘a graveyard of dead narrative’ (Russ, ‘The Wearing Out...’ 52), this was a moment to explore the potential that science fiction held for women writers. Russ reasoned that ‘the last or next-to-last of something’ might also be ‘a sort of jumping-off place’ (51). Consequently, Russ invited women to take up the challenge of intervening in a male dominated genre,

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<sup>11</sup> In ‘(Re)Reading Queerly’, Veronica Hollinger discusses gender performance and the queer possibilities of the cyborg figure in Tiptree’s text. I expand on Hollinger’s discussion by arguing that ‘The Girl Who...’ is a text that queers the science fiction trope of the mechanical woman arguing that Tiptree’s short story carries a sub-text that reflects Tiptree’s own repressed desires for other women.

declaring: ‘Women can’t write – using the old myths. But using new ones - ?’ (Russ, ‘Why Women Can’t Write’ 93).

In addition to Russ’s influential critical work, feminist Shulamith Firestone produced a book titled The Dialectic of Sex (1970). In this text, Firestone proposed that technology had the potential to free women from the ‘tyranny of their sexual reproductive roles’ (35). Through ‘cybernation’, meaning the technological intervention into biological processes, Firestone argued that the division of labor [between men and women] would be ended by the elimination of labor [giving birth] altogether’ (12). Furthermore, Firestone argued that in order for women to overcome the limitations of modern society, it was necessary to imagine how technology in future societies would transform the lives of women. However, Firestone also claimed: ‘We haven’t even a literary image of this future society; there is not even a *utopian* feminist literature yet in existence’ (256). In response to Russ and Firestone, feminist writers began to utilise science fiction firstly to expose the gender biases inherent within the genre and, secondly, to explore sexual difference. While some feminist texts promoted utopian futures where separatism was the inevitable outcome of insurmountable differences between the sexes, usually through the removal of the dominant male sex, others imagined worlds where inequalities between the sexes had either been transcended or simply reversed. As Roger Luckhurst explains, American feminists ‘disarticulated the genre, exposing its limits and inherent biases. They then rearticulated the tropes of the genre to serve productive and critical ends’ (172).

Tiptree’s short stories are examples of how women writers utilised standard science fiction tropes to create narratives conducive to feminism. At the same time, Tiptree’s work reflects her opinions about women and men in society,

as she believed that women and men are essentially different, and are driven by biological imperatives, which neither is unable to overcome.<sup>12</sup> Alienation between the sexes is a recurring theme in Tiptree's work. Solutions to this alienation vary from a utopian vision where the male sex no longer exists, or where women, who do not conform to patriarchal ideals of femininity, find love through alien encounters on alternate worlds. In 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' (1976), Tiptree adopts the trope of time travel to create a darkly humorous vision of a feminine utopian future. In this short story, the narrative begins with three male astronauts who are stranded in space and are intercepted by a space ship run by an all-female crew. The male astronauts have been propelled into a future where men have become extinct (196-197). Soon they learn that without men, women have developed and advanced biotechnology to reproduce their species through cloning. As the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that the astronauts are overtly misogynist and the story ends with the women deciding to kill them, explaining: 'We can hardly turn you loose on Earth, and we simply have no facilities for people with your emotional problems' (215). Tiptree's women-only utopia evokes the work of writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her novel Herland (1915), where three men, who have happened across an all-female society, are expelled because of their emotional differences. In narratives such as 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' it is suggested that women can only flourish in a society free of men, because men are irredeemable.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see Julie Phillips's biography James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon (2006) where she discusses Tiptree's anger 'at the female body' and Tiptree's contradictory ideas about sex and gender. As Phillips explains, Tiptree often shifted between the idea that 'male and female are cultural categories, [...] [and] that they were biologically determined' (Phillips 87).

In texts by Tiptree where women do not conform to society's ideal of femaleness, or femininity, they are presented as outsiders, strange, or, like Philadelphia Burke, an aberration. Often, they are alienated and estranged from society, leading them to desperate measures. In 'The Women Men Don't See' (1973), a text that I will return to later in this chapter, two female protagonists, a mother and a daughter, start a new life free from the constraints imposed upon them by patriarchy, by leaving earth on an alien spacecraft. Finding an alternative life, or even alternative lovers through alien contact not only reflected Tiptree's views about gender relations in society, but also linked her work to feminism. Tiptree's work resonated with contemporary feminist thought because the treatment of women and technology in her texts expressed the contemporary difficulties that women were trying to overcome. In contrast to her utopian visions of separatism and escape, and to McCaffrey's optimistic vision of a female cyborg empowered by technology, Tiptree's dystopian narratives, such as 'The Girl Who...' (1973), is a cynical representation of women trapped by a male dominated society and its technology, preventing women from defining a female identity for themselves.

### **The Feminine Ideal and the Deconstruction of Gender in Tiptree's Cyborg Text**

In Tiptree's cyborg narrative, Philadelphia Burke desires to become the woman that patriarchy manufactures and promotes as the feminine ideal. At a moment when women were threatening the gendered social order, Tiptree's cyborg protagonist reflects how patriarchy desired to contain women as Philadelphia Burke is given the illusion of empowerment, while in fact she is

coerced and controlled by patriarchy. This is reflected in the choice of name for her new identity. As the narrator points out, the name Philadelphia signifies fraternity and freedom, '*brotherly love, Liberty-Bell*' (Tiptree 12). Her surname, Burke, alludes to Edmund Burke, the British philosopher and political thinker who in the eighteenth century promoted American independence over British rule.<sup>13</sup> The name Philadelphia Burke suggests that perhaps Tiptree's female protagonist will undergo some form of transformation that will emancipate her from the constraints of patriarchal culture. However, American fraternity and liberty is based on the ideal of equality between men, which, ultimately, is dependent on the subordination of women. Deriving the diminutive 'girl [...] nickname' Delphi from Philadelphia binds Philadelphia Burke to a femininity that signifies her subordination to patriarchy (12). In 'The Girl Who...' patriarchy's feminine ideal is represented by the artificial construct Delphi, a name that alludes to the oracle from Greek mythology, a demi-god, through which the Greek God Apollo spoke. Like Delphi in Tiptree's text, the oracle was a woman who was possessed and controlled by an unseen force in order to serve the purposes of men. Philadelphia Burke is given the opportunity to become Delphi, but this all depends on her ability to merge with technology.

The world that Philadelphia Burke inhabits is the urban landscape of the near future, where the aggressive advertising of commodities has been banned: 'All the media and most of the landscape was taken up with extravagant competing displays. The thing [advertising] became uneconomic. The public rebelled' (Tiptree 13). In place of advertising, companies created a generation of

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<sup>13</sup> Edmund Burke's support of American Independence was conditional. He considered that if the American colonies were empowered to govern themselves then they should remain loyal to their British brothers. Similarly, Philadelphia Burke is granted empowerment on the condition that she remains loyal to patriarchal authority.

celebrities. Unknown to the public, these celebrities are artificially grown in ‘Placental Decanters’ and controlled by people called ‘Remotes’ (14). The purpose of the celebrity is to persuade consumers to buy products. However, without the ‘Remotes’ to control them, the celebrity is ‘just a vegetable’ (11). Philadelphia Burke becomes a ‘Remote’ through a sequence of unfortunate circumstances. Philadelphia Burke is described as the ‘ugly of the world’ (3). In Chapter Two, I discussed the theme of beauty arguing that in the final instance McCaffrey devalues the impaired body by presenting Helva’s success through an ideal image of femininity. In ‘The Girl Who...’ it is made clear that the female protagonist is physically deformed and her features unredeemable: ‘A tall monument to pituitary dystrophy. No surgeon would touch her. When she smiles, her jaw – it’s half purple – almost bites her left eye out’ (3).

Philadelphia Burke’s extreme physical state disrupts her gender identity. As the narrator explains, ‘Look. P. Burke is about as far as you can get from the concept *girl*’ (20). Here, Tiptree draws attention to the fact that the identity ‘girl’ is socially constructed and utilises the trope of disability in order to highlight and deconstruct the cultural norms that give rise to ‘the concept *girl*’. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, in her article ‘Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory’ (2002), argues that ‘Integrating disability into feminist theory [...] clarifies how [...] systems [meaning race, sexuality, ethnicity, or gender] operate together, yet distinctly, to support an imaginary norm and structure the relations that grant power, privilege, and status to that norm’ (3). Similarly, Tiptree’s text subverts the imaginary norms that grant power, privilege and status to those who conform to patriarchal ideals of gender identity. Throughout the novella, Tiptree refers to her female protagonist as P. Burke, a name that is without title, status or



social meaning, connoting her deviation from the gender 'norms' defining femininity. Through P. Burke's abject physical state, Tiptree offers a critique of gender in patriarchal culture.

It is P. Burke's non-identity and marginal position in society, which leads her to commit suicide. Her life as a 'Remote' begins when her suicide attempt fails and to her dismay she survives. Taken from the street, P. Burke is offered the opportunity to live another life, the life of a celebrity (Tiptree 2). Her former existence is erased as she takes on the secret life of a 'Remote.' Trained in her new job, she proves more than adept in her role: 'Somewhere in that horrible body is a gazelle, a houri who would have been buried forever without this crazy chance. See the ugly duckling go!' (8). P. Burke learns to control the beautiful body of Delphi and perform perfect femininity, convincing the male protagonist of the story, Paul Isham III, that Delphi is a 'real' woman (20).

The division between a woman and the feminine ideal was an issue that both Tiptree and Russ frequently discussed in their exchange of letters. Russ complained to Tiptree of the lack of female role models as she was growing up in the 1950s: 'Women never did anything remotely interesting, so I identified with the men in all the books and films and in life, too, almost – which leaves you with an awful split sort of life' (Phillips 303). Neither Tiptree nor Russ could relate to the notion of woman bound by patriarchal conventions. Consequently, their discussions often returned to the problem of how to be a woman (Phillips 303). In contrast to Russ, who questioned the naturalness of gender and sexual identities defined by patriarchy, Tiptree frequently returned to viewing men and women as biologically determined and limited. As her biographer, Julie Phillips, explains, Tiptree believed that 'Only when people understood their biological drives, [...]

could they transcend them, learn to control their emotions, and achieve real cultural change' (293). Tiptree considered that biology determined women's inability to forge political alliances. At the same time, Tiptree felt angry towards women and the limitations she believed they imposed upon themselves. Therefore, Tiptree's complaints about women were often contradictory and implied that women were not necessarily determined by their sex but, in fact, they colluded in their own subordination. As Julie Phillips explains:

She wanted to like them, but was regularly disappointed by their failure to take their future seriously, by their artificiality, later by their reluctance to think politically and their willingness to put with the status quo. She wanted women to join forces, but there seemed to be 'so very many who cling to, [take] pride in their deformity of soul'. (69)

Tiptree expressed the alienation she experienced as a woman living in a patriarchal society while exploring the limitations she thought were inherently female. In 'The Girl Who...' she raises two themes common in her work: the breakdown of communication between the sexes, resulting in failed love and death, and the inability of women to move beyond the social norms patriarchy prescribes them because of their biological difference to men. Utilising images of woman as physically impaired and physically perfect, Tiptree explored the

ideological constraints imposed upon women under patriarchy, to the cost of the female protagonist.

### **‘The Girl Who Was Plugged In’: Revising the Science Fiction Narrative of the Mechanical Woman**

In essence, ‘The Girl Who...’ retells the fairytale story of Cinderella where a young woman is transformed from a socially alienated ‘ugly duckling’ into a ravishing beauty, guaranteeing her social status as she finally gets her man (Gordon 194). However Tiptree subverts this literary convention because her female cyborg disrupts science fiction narratives concerned with the mechanical woman. In such narratives, technology is used to make woman aesthetically pleasing to men, transforming her into the ideal housewife or lover, or sometimes both. An early example of this trope can be found in Lester Del Ray’s ‘Helen O’Loy’, published in 1938. ‘Helen O’Loy’ draws upon the mythical figure Helen of Troy, whose beauty is said to have brought chaos to the world of patriarchy. However in Del Ray’s narrative, the artificial woman, Helen, is controlled and tamed by technology, bringing order and reassurance to men living in an uncertain world. Helen is the perfect muse for Del Ray’s male fantasy of domination over both women and technology: ‘She was beautiful, a dream in spun plastics and metals, something Keats might have seen dimly when he wrote his sonnet’ (49). The artificial woman, Helen, learns about romance and emotions that are appropriately feminine by patriarchal standards, through tuning in to soap operas on the ‘stereovisor’ (57). Needless to say, Helen’s role is to learn how to please her man, by not only being a ‘super-efficient housekeeper’ (58), but also by being

the perfect loyal wife and lover to the scientist Dave, who helped to construct her: 'No woman ever made a lovelier or a sweeter wife' (64).

In contrast to Del Ray's fantasy woman, when P. Burke is modified and her body is interfaced with technology, her outward appearance does not improve: 'If possible [she looks] worse than before' (Tiptree 8), and teasingly, the narrator poses the question, 'You thought this was Cinderella transistorized?' (8). Instead, 'The Girl Who...' is a satire on romance, told through the science fiction myth of the technologically perfectible and malleable woman. To emphasise the inversion of this fantasy, Tiptree outlines the adverse outcome of P. Burke's coupling with technology:

The disimprovement in her looks comes  
from the electrode jacks peeping out of her  
sparse hair, and there are other meldings of  
flesh and metal. On the other hand, that collar  
and spine plate are a real asset; you won't miss  
seeing that neck. (8)

Rather than P. Burke being transformed into a beautiful woman, she remains ugly. The consequence of this lack of transformation leads to a series of misunderstandings, which finally ends in P. Burke's death.

In the final dramatic sequence of Tiptree's novella, when Paul Isham III begins to realise that Delphi is being controlled in order to serve his father's company, he misdiagnoses the nature of this control: 'You're a *doll*! You're one of those PP implants. They control you. I should have known. Oh God, I should

have known' (44). Paul decides to rescue Delphi and free her from the shackles of servitude. Paul is the fairytale knight in shining armour coming to rescue his princess. However, when he encounters P. Burke, he is horrified by what he sees, namely, P. Burke, the real woman, living out her dream as the perfect female through the artificial body of Delphi. Paul, in his confusion, kills P. Burke and is left with the lifeless body of Delphi (52-53). In this tale, there is no happy ending for either P. Burke or Paul. Tiptree's text does little to challenge the expectation that 'ugly' women will not succeed or be happy. However, I would argue that the negative outcome of 'The Girl Who...' serves to critique the realities that women face on a daily basis. This reality includes the fact that despite women's capabilities, they are encouraged to view themselves as subordinate to men and imperfect. Tiptree's text stresses the fact that romantic narratives representing women achieving the feminine ideal, and gaining social status and economic security through the acquisition of the perfect male lover, only assist in maintaining women in a subservient position to men.

### **Tiptree and Firestone: A Critique of the 'Culture of Romance' and Feminine Beauty in Patriarchal Culture**

Tiptree's treatment of romance in 'The Girl Who...' reflects Shulamith Firestone's view of 'the culture of romance' described in The Dialectic of Sex (165). In this critique, Firestone lambastes patriarchal institutions for perpetuating the myth of the gallant hero, who elevates women 'to states of mock worship' (166). Firestone argues that such myths maintain women in a position of inferiority because female identities are reduced to stereotypes; 'Romanticism is a cultural tool of male power to keep women from knowing their condition' (166).

Therefore, through romance, woman's individuality is erased and replaced with a distorted image of the feminine, where women are considered all alike sexually. As Firestone goes on to argue, '*The sex privatisation of women is the process whereby women are blinded to their generality as a class which renders them invisible as individuals to the male eye*' (168). Indeed, P. Burke is so desperate to become Delphi in Tiptree's novella that she fails to see or even understand her own exploitation within a patriarchal system. A politically naive P. Burke blinds herself to the fact that it is only the manufactured and mass marketed ideal of woman that is of value to the male protagonists in the narrative, not P. Burke herself. In turn, as Firestone argues, female stereotypes encourage men to see women as dolls, and women respond by expressing their individuality through aspiring towards a feminine standard defined by men (170), 'Thus women become more and more look-alike' (172).

P. Burke is unique in her extraordinary ability to persuade the public to consume products. However, her fantasy alter ego, Delphi, is a model of femininity which women are encouraged to emulate. In Firestone's feminist text, women are presented as desperate to conform, as they buy into patriarchy's female stereotype. As a result, women are trapped within a technologically dominating system from which there is no escape. Firestone writes, 'The competition becomes frantic, because everyone is now plugged into the same circuit. The current beauty ideal becomes all-pervasive' (174). Woman as a formulaic standard, which men desire, underpins the male fantasy of domination over women. Woman who conforms to an ideal defined by patriarchy boosts the male ego, because her proximity to the feminine ideal also assists in defining his masculinity and hence his success as a man. However, in 'The Girl Who...' Paul

Isham's heroic deeds are undone when it comes to light that Delphi is merely an artificial construct. As Paul Isham's name suggests, the status of the male hero of the narrative is suspect. Isham is 'a sham'. He is a simulation, a counterfeit, and as his title, III, implies, Paul is a copy of an original. Just as Delphi is a construct that is meant to represent a 'real' woman, Paul Isham III is one of many representations of male protagonists in science fiction whose masculinity depends on a woman's faithful performance of femininity. Consequently, patriarchal values are exposed as a sham when patriarchal femininity is highlighted to be merely a social construction upon which the hero's maleness depends. Similar to Moore's 'No Woman Born' discussed in Chapter One, Tiptree's satire on the romantic narrative deconstructs femininity and masculinity through the cyborg figure.

Firestone's analysis of the role of romance in patriarchal culture is exemplified in Tiptree's science fiction text. Tiptree's story represents women divided through its two very different female protagonists. P. Burke is an example of a woman that men fail to see or acknowledge because, despite the skill that she may possess, her physical appearance does not warrant male attention. In sharp contrast, Delphi represents an ideal of womanhood that no real woman can live up to, but which is valued by patriarchy. It is an image that is endlessly circulated by media technology, coercing women into conformity. P. Burke is an example of a woman who desires to escape the physical and social limitations of her own existence through the idealised body of Delphi. She wants to be the woman that patriarchal society prefers and rewards. In this context, P. Burke is 'the girl' who is 'plugged in' to the media circuit that promotes perfect femininity and which proliferates idealised images of woman. Delphi is the doll-like automaton that P.

Burke remotely controls, but who she also desires to be. However, in Tiptree's text, P. Burke does not successfully achieve the Cinderella transformation. Instead of technology making P. Burke beautiful, her body is mutilated. In the end, P. Burke is replaced with another 'Remote' while the construct Delphi is resurrected. For the company and its artificially grown celebrities, it is business as usual:

Sure Delphi lives again. Next year she's back  
on her yacht getting sympathy for her tragic  
breakdown. But there's a different chick in  
Chile, because while Delphi's new operator is  
competent, you don't get two P. Burkes  
in a row – for which GTX is duly grateful. (56)

In this final statement, a real woman is erased by the unreal feminine ideal, indicating how women are subsumed within a culture owned and controlled by patriarchy.

Tiptree's narrative is pessimistic about women and technology, particularly when technology is used to affirm ideologies that coerce women into conforming to patriarchal standards of beauty. Tiptree's pessimism has been noted by Heather Hicks, who observes that 'Tiptree's novella serves up perhaps the most despairing rendering to date of the woman's body in the technosphere' (69). In turn, Veronica Hollinger argues that 'P. Burke is precisely the body that does *not* matter, the body that must be hidden underground in a hi-tech cabinet while her mind remotely operates the beautiful soulless body of Delphi' (310). Underpinning Hollinger's claim is Despina Kakoudaki's analysis of the artificial



woman in relation to disability: ‘Most stories about artificial women either posit them as a priori beautiful constructed women as foil or cover for the unseen/disabled woman’ (172). Finally, Donawerth argues that when the ‘inner woman’, P. Burke, is revealed to be a ‘monster’, she is punished and dies (66).

In these analyses of P. Burke/Delphi, the ugly woman/disabled woman is presented as primarily a negative trope. Of particular interest is Donawerth’s argument that, at best, woman as machine asserts autonomy, while at worst, ‘the grotesquerie of the union suggests the machine as symbol of failed androgyny; the parts – technology and art, object and subjectivity, man and woman – are too opposed to fit together comfortably’ (68). Donawerth’s analysis astutely reflects Tiptree’s viewpoint that women are only too willing to ‘take pride in their deformity of soul’ (Phillips 66), and that men and women are so opposed that relations between the sexes will always be less than satisfactory. Indeed, Tiptree’s narrative explores how technology subordinates and negates women and their bodies within patriarchal society and culture. P. Burke is a cyborg figure that desires control over a body that will elevate her status in society. However, the body that is offered to P. Burke is patriarchy’s own version of a woman empowered by technology, which continues to maintain her in a subordinate position. Nonetheless, Donawerth’s comment about ‘failed androgyny’ is interesting and I would like to explore this in more detail. However, I do not view the ugly women/disabled woman as a negative trope but instead see it as a trope operating in a critical mode that offers insight into women’s condition within patriarchal culture. The cyborg figure in Tiptree’s text embodies the tensions that reflect women’s desire to escape patriarchal control, while patriarchy continues to find ways to dominate her through technology. In order to explore these tensions

in Tiptree's cyborg text in more detail, it is necessary to discuss cyborg texts that were produced during the 1970s.

### **Violence and the Perfectible Woman In American Science Fiction**

At a time when second wave feminism was emerging as a political force, the mechanical woman appeared as the ideal male fantasy in literary culture. An example is Ira Levin's 1972 pro-feminist novel The Stepford Wives (1972), which was made into a film of the same title and released in 1975. Unlike Del Ray's short story, which is presented as a gentle and sentimental narrative, expressing male desire for life long devotion and female companionship, Levin's novel re-presents the trope of the mechanical woman within a more sinister context. In this modern science fiction horror story, Levin's Stepford women are literally terrorised by patriarchy's ideal of femininity. Focusing on the married life of protagonist Joanna Eberhart, Levin's text begins with a woman who radically questions and resists the social arrangements that facilitate gender inequality in patriarchal society. Nonetheless, Levin's narrative ends with Joanna being killed and replaced by a subservient mechanical replica that is more conducive to serving her husband's, and patriarchy's needs. Levin's text reflects contemporary male anxieties about women's emerging empowerment and simultaneously confirms women's worst fears, which are that men will, if necessary, curtail women's desire for emancipation through violence. Ultimately, in Levin's work, female cyborgs are patriarchy's perfect alternatives to real women – they represent women dominated and controlled by patriarchal technology.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> During the 1970s, the most popular image of a female cyborg was the fictional character Jamie Sommers in the television series The Bionic Woman (1976). Jamie is injured in a skydiving accident and reconstructed into a female cyborg with superhuman strength. As Sherrie A. Inness argues in Tough Girls (1999), 'the Bionic Woman was [...] far tougher than most women on

The coercion of women to conform to patriarchy's ideal of femininity underpinned by the underlying threat of violence is present in Tiptree's cyborg text. In Future Females, The Next Generation (2000), Marleen S. Barr reads 'The Girl Who...' as an appropriation of a mainstream story that follows man's obsession to perfect the female body. Barr argues that the obsession with the perfect female form 'masks the male desire to eliminate women' (27). A classic example in American literature, of which Tiptree's text is reminiscent, is Nathaniel Hawthorne's Gothic text 'The Birthmark' (1843). 'The Birthmark' is about a woman who is coerced by her husband into perfecting her appearance. Hawthorne's female protagonist is beautiful, but she has a birthmark on her face, which her husband desires to eradicate. However, this desire to rid his wife of this imperfection results in her death, when the potion, which her husband creates and administers to her, kills her. Hawthorne's text demonstrates how men fear the female 'Other' and are driven to dominate and control women through patriarchal myths of female beauty and perfection. As Barr suggests, replacing real women with an unreal feminine ideal is a violent male act, which allays male fears about losing power over both the self and women. However, 'The Birthmark' also presents a woman who is willing to collude in her own oppression, by faithfully internalising her husband's neurosis.

In both Hawthorne's and Tiptree's narratives, the technological attempt to perfect woman links femaleness to disability, a cultural association that is explored

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television in the 1970s. However, she also perpetuated feminine stereotypes, [...] Jamie was a combination of the taboo and the socially acceptable. She could outrun any man (except Steve) [meaning Steve Austin, the equally popular male cyborg the Bionic Man] and punch a hole in a brick wall, yet she was a conventionally beautiful woman who did not strongly challenge traditional notions about woman's desirable appearance. [...] The Bionic Woman seemed to subvert typical gender stereotypes – but only on the surface' (Inness 45-46).

in the work of Rosemarie Garland Thomson. Garland Thomson, in her article 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory' (2002), argues that disability theory informs feminism about how women's bodies are regarded in patriarchal culture. Garland Thomson contends that 'the cultural function of the disabled figure is to act as a synecdoche for all forms that culture deems 'non-normative' (3). Here, Garland Thomson's cultural link between the female body and the disabled subject is pertinent to understanding how identities defined as 'Other' to the human male are subsumed within disability discourses. Garland Thomson goes on to state: 'Recognizing how the concept of disability has been used to cast the form and functioning of female bodies as non-normative can extend feminist critiques' (5). Garland Thomson's statement suggests that the female and disabled subject share a commonality: they are individuals constrained by patriarchal ideologies that de-value and limit them because of physical difference.

Haraway's cyborg theory operates in a similar way to Garland Thomson's feminist disability theory. Haraway's cyborg promotes political cohesion between identities that are marked by 'difference'. As with the female and disabled body, the figure of the cyborg encompasses identities that are viewed as either excessive or lacking – identities that are viewed as either more or less than human, but never fully human. Within patriarchal ideology, such identities are occupied by women and the disabled and are encoded as feminine. Like the cyborg, women and the disabled are excluded from the category 'human,' because of their physical difference. In this respect, women and the disabled subject could be deemed analogous, particularly when they are considered 'Other' in relation to the human (Shakespeare 258, 298). In-keeping with Haraway's cyborg theory, I would

argue that Tiptree's cyborg narrative re-appropriates the artificial woman, juxtaposing the image of physical impairment with the perfect body in a critical mode. Therefore, I propose that Delphi represents the ideal woman, and P. Burke is the 'ugly of the world' (Tiptree 3), representing the majority of women who are coerced into conforming to such an ideal. However, the ideal woman in Tiptree's cyborg narrative is also a contradictory figure that speaks of feminist ideas about liberation as well as patriarchy's desire to assimilate these ideas for its own purposes. Therefore, I will discuss the image of Delphi in relation to the ideal woman as she was constructed in the 1970s, arguing that Delphi occupies a cultural site that both feminism and patriarchy contested.

### **The Problem of Androgyny: Feminist Resistance v Patriarchal Assimilation**

In Tiptree's text, Delphi's body is artificially constructed and moulded to the desires of patriarchal society: 'Where did that girl-body come from?' asks the narrator, a question raised by P. Burke herself, to which Joe, the technician who operates her, replies, 'They grow 'em'' (Tiptree 11). Delphi is constructed as an innocent 'girl child' (9). She has the 'perfect girl-body' with 'little arms' and 'mini-breasts' (9-10). Delphi's pre-pubescent sexuality is androgynous, which is to both men and women 'seductive' (14). Delphi is, as Tiptree writes, 'porno for angels' (9). However, Delphi's androgyny and ambiguous sexuality is an embodiment of two contradictory political ideas that constructed the perfect woman during the 1970s. Firstly, Delphi possesses physical qualities that evoke feminist values of the time: it is a body that elides feminine traits of the 1950s, which emphasised the reproductive role of women and her place in the domestic sphere. As Barbara A. Cohen points out in her study of women, psychology and

the ideal body image, 'The similarity of women's political activities in the 1920s and the 1970s is reflected in the idealized body image. When women demanded equal rights, the ideal became thinner and more boyish' (Cohen 1). Therefore, Delphi's androgyny proposes a female body that is liberated from the role of reproduction and patriarchal conventions that limit women.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the androgynous subject was a figure explored by feminist science fiction novels, of which Ursula Le Guin's novel The Left Hand of Darkness (1969) and Joanna Russ's The Female Man (1975) are examples. In Le Guin's text, an androgynous race has been created through genetic modification, while in Russ's text, it is women from an unnamed future and place who time travel to earth that bear androgynous physical traits and characteristics. However, unlike Le Guin's and Russ's narratives, which are concerned with the political implications of androgynous identities and non-heterosexual relations, in Tiptree's text, a body ideal connoting androgyny is open to commodification in the service of patriarchy. Delphi possesses a body image that is created by the company GTX, which is owned by the corporate magnate, Mr. 'Isham senior' (Tiptree 34). When P. Burke is introduced to Isham's representative Mr. Cantle, it is made clear to her the reason for Delphi, which is to sell products: 'And now, Delphi, you know what you are going to be doing for us. You're going to show some products' (14). The underdeveloped female body of Delphi is coupled with the mind of P. Burke, who is naive and lacking worldly experience. This produces a wide-eyed, naïve and waif-like young figure that is ripe for sexual and economic exploitation. As the narrator of Tiptree's story claims, Delphi's androgynous identity is a key factor in her success as a celebrity selling commodities: 'Delphi not only has it for anybody with a Y-chromosome,

but also for women and everything in between. It's the sweet supernatural jackpot, the million-to-one' (30). Delphi's androgynous body is an identity that promises to liberate P. Burke from the constraints of her physical limitations. However, the commodification of Delphi's androgyny suggests the power of patriarchal capitalism to assimilate alternative physical ideals in ways that is oppressive to women.

Supporting Barbara Cohen's analysis of feminism and its relationship with idealised notions of the female body is Catherine Gourley's study of popular images of women from the 1970s to the 1990s. In this study, she explores women's liberation in the 1970s in relation to both the emergence of feminist political ideals and women's increasing economic power and their potential as conspicuous consumers. By discussing the relationship between the lives of women, changing fashions and body shape, which were promoted through the shop mannequin, she demonstrates how beauty and the ideal woman is historically contested and culturally contingent:

In the 1950s, [...] mannequins had large breasts and hips but small, cinched waists to promote the styles of the time. In the late 1960s and 1970s the flat-chested, little-girl look became more popular and so the mannequins lost weight [...]  
Mannequins are a type of three-dimensional advertisement. They sell clothing and jewelry. But they also sell something else... They sell an image of what a girl's body should be. (60)

Gourley's association of the ideal female body shape and the mannequin, described by her as a tool for selling commodities, resonates with Tiptree's text and her artificial woman, Delphi. In Chapter One, I discussed the effacement of real women by an ideal female form that linked modern woman with the machine aesthetic promoted through the shop mannequin. Similarly, Gourley's discussion of the mannequin and the female body offers insight into the cultural landscape of the 1970s and the assimilation of feminist political ideals about women's liberation, by the fashion industry in its pursuit of profit.

### **The Tyranny of Beauty: Consumer Culture and the Recon(dis)figuration of the Female Form**

Veronica Hollinger has aptly described Delphi as a "living advertisement" (311), and Tiptree's narrative demonstrates how celebrities are like the mannequins described in Gourley's text: they are 'three-dimensional advertisements' that are used to persuade women to consume products. In the case of Delphi, she is also selling the ideal body image, which of course requires beauty products to maintain it. Despite the fact that Delphi is an artificial construct, whose body is perfect, she nonetheless sports a 'new body lift' – a 'mini grav pak that imparts a delicious sense of weightlessness' (Tiptree 32). The glamorous status of the celebrity is important for selling products to other women, and it is made clear in Tiptree's text that beauty is far from natural. Instead, beauty is an instrument of tyranny that coerces women into supporting the values of patriarchal capitalism by becoming part of the consumer collective. If women do not conform and consume, they are deemed a failure. For instance, when P. Burke meets the fatherly figure of Mr. Cantle in her new form as Delphi, he assumes that P. Burke



is a woman who consumes beauty products promoted by his celebrities ‘Why did *you* buy your particular body-lift?’ (14). P. Burke explains to Mr. Cantle that she has never bought a body-lift, which angers and disappoints him: ‘Mr. Cantle frowns; what gutters do they drag for these remotes?’ (14). In P. Burke’s society, women who consume commodities have value and status, while those who do not are considered worthless.

Tiptree’s cyborg narrative criticizes the advertising industry for generating images that promote the perfect woman, an unobtainable ideal, which encourages women to view themselves as less than perfect. As failures, women are coerced into buying into the beauty myth. Donawerth argues that P. Burke ‘represents the innately ‘defective’ woman who must construct her beauty through consumerism; she is literally a social mechanism to stimulate consumption’ (65). Donawerth points out that Tiptree’s female cyborg consumer anticipates Naomi Wolf’s analysis of the beauty myth in western culture (65). I want to expand on Donawerth’s comment about Tiptree’s female cyborg by focusing on Wolf’s discussion of the female form as it was redefined during the 1970s and which associated women with disability.

Another important context for analysing Tiptree’s fiction about the ‘perfect’ female body is the development of ‘plastic’ surgery. Tiptree’s work emerged during a moment when aesthetic surgery in North America was formalised into a profit-seeking business. In her book The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women (1990) Naomi Wolf argues that ‘In 1978, the American Medical Association made the claim that preoccupation with beauty was the same as preoccupation with health’ (227). Therefore, the 1970s saw an association made between the perfect body, the healthy body and feminine

beauty promoted alongside women's feelings of well being (227). In order to benefit services and products offered and manufactured by the beauty industry, the bodies of women previously considered healthy were becoming reclassified as 'disfigured' (227). The example that Wolf uses is cellulite, which before 1973 was considered 'normal female flesh' (227). Therefore, although healthy, women were encouraged to view themselves as physically impaired. This, Wolf argues, coerced women into engaging in 'fantasies in mass culture that assembled the perfect woman' (59).

Tiptree's text reflects this ideological concept outlined by Wolf. When P. Burke gains control over Delphi's body, she willingly succumbs to patriarchy's ideal of feminine beauty because it gives her a sense of self-worth. As the narrator explains: 'She [Delphi] doesn't smile, she...brims. That brimming joy is all that shows of P. Burke, the forgotten hulk in the sauna next door' (Tiptree 12). At this moment, the reader is presented with a woman who is literally divided between two bodies: an ugly, deformed body and a perfect body. The coupling of P. Burke's imperfect body with the perfect body of Delphi evokes Russ's and Tiptree's discussion about women's experience in patriarchal society as being an 'awful split sort of life' (Phillips 303), where women are forced to exist between identities both real and imaginary. However, where Russ identified with male characters, because they did things that were interesting, Tiptree's P. Burke is more than happy to perform the part of the little rich girl at play with her expensive toys: 'Parties – clothes – suncars! Delphi's pink mouth opens. In P. Burke's starved seventeen year-old head the ethics of product sponsorship floats away' (Tiptree 16). Passively, P. Burke allows herself to enjoy the immediate gratification of consumer culture, buying into the desires that commodities

promise to fulfil.

For P. Burke, the opportunity to become a celebrity is a dream come true, but it is a dream that soon turns sour, when she realises that the products that she is promoting are not what they seem. Wolf discusses the association of physical perfection with the healthy body. However, Gourley points out that the ideal body image promoted through the shop mannequin was not only 'unrealistic' but also 'unhealthy' (60). Similarly, the relentless pursuit of the ideal female body by women in Tiptree's text is presented as a health risk. As Delphi continues to use the beauty products that she has been created to promote, her body begins to react: 'She says the plastic gave her a rash and the glo-pills made her dizzy' (Tiptree 32). Delphi begins to question the integrity of the products: 'I don't think this new body-lift is safe,' Delphi is saying. 'It's made a funny blue spot on me – look Mr. Vere. [...] 'So don't leave it *on*, Dee.' [...] 'But if I don't wear it, it isn't honest' (32-33). Ironically, the beauty products that Delphi uses and promotes make her feel unwell and threaten to disfigure her, indicating the psychological and physiological damage done to women when they pursue the feminine ideal.

In magazines, women are bombarded with advertising images, featuring the bodies of perfect women, encouraging women to buy into the beauty myth through product consumption. Women internalise these images, distorting their own self-image. Although perfectly healthy, femaleness becomes associated with physical impairment as women become alienated from their own bodies, losing self-esteem. As Wolf explains, 'A man is "deformed" if a limb or feature is missing or severely skewed from the human phenotype...A woman is being asked to feel like a monster now though she is whole and physically functional' (228).

Women, regardless of their physical status develop dysmorphia and view their bodies, or part(s) of their bodies, as out of proportion or even disgusting.

Wolf's comment is pertinent to the figure of P. Burke. Throughout the text, P. Burke is described as a 'girl-brute', 'monster', 'freak' (6, 37, 50), but she is not a woman who is missing a limb or who essentially requires a prosthetic in order to function. Instead, her physical impairment is described in terms of body parts, which are out of proportion to the rest of her body. The distortion of P. Burke's physiognomy is extreme: P. Burke has 'big hands' and her body is 'a hulk' (6, 12), she is physically whole, but misshapen. This leads me to question whether P. Burke 'really' is physically impaired, or is she merely presented as so by the narrator. Possibly, what Tiptree presents to the reader is P. Burke's own self-image, implying, as Wolf claims, that women are alienated from their bodies because they are coerced into viewing the female body as always less than perfect. As the narrator cruelly points out, P. Burke is 'the monster down in the dungeon, [...] A caricature of a woman [...] obsessed with true love' (37). The monster in the dungeon is a metaphor which alludes to negative images of the abject feminine self that women internalise and bury deep in the psyche. They are images of woman that women wish to hide from the world. However, psychologically for women there is no escape.

In Tiptree's cyborg text, P. Burke and Delphi represent women who fail to reconcile the contradictions that their existence entails. 'The Girl Who...' demonstrates how women are entrapped by the double standards that bind women to the beauty myth, leaving no room for women to move beyond their prescribed roles within patriarchal culture. In the final moment when P. Burke is revealed to Paul as the 'real' woman behind the artificial construct Delphi, her body literally

spills out, fragments and falls apart: 'The doors tear open and a monster rises up...a gaunt she golem flab-naked and spouting wires and blood...P. Burke has so to speak her nervous system hanging out' (53). P. Burke, 'the gaunt she golem', is a physical and emotional mess. Her 'nervous system', a communication network that is vital for holding her two identities in place, eliding the contradictions of her divided existence through the façade of the artificial woman, fails, exposing her as a fraud. The fact that P. Burke will be exposed for not being the woman that her lover thinks she is, is not lost on her. As the narrator explains, P. Burke's mind is divided over what to do about her dilemma: 'She has phases. The trying, first. And the shame. The SHAME. *I am not what thou lovest*' (37). Shame and guilt are what women are coerced into feeling. Women fear being exposed as less than perfect and therefore consider themselves frauds. Ultimately, P. Burke, who is unable to maintain her masquerade as a beautiful woman, is destroyed and easily replaced. In contrast, Delphi's beauty is timeless and her body is resurrected again.

### **Disability and (Im)Perfect Femininity**

The divide between the imperfect, monstrous, ugly self and a desire to be perfect is an ancient trope that is evaluated through the female body. In Lennard J. Davis's discussion of the artistic representation of the female nude, which, Davis argues, is a tradition that centres upon the figure of Venus, he describes how the female body undergoes a process of 'splitting', whereby imperfection is excised and placed upon the body of 'her poignant double,' Medusa. Consequently, Davis states that, 'Medusa is the disabled woman to Venus's perfect body' (55).

However, as I am about to discuss, the perfect female body also connotes lack and impairment.

P. Burke and Delphi are two women who are evaluated through their bodies. Garland Thomson's analysis of femininity and disability states that '[...] gender,...and ability systems intertwine further in representing subjugated people as being pure body, unredeemed by mind and spirit' (Garland Thomson, 'Integrating Disability...' 5). P. Burke, when conjoined with technology, possesses a highly skilled mind but is grotesque; Delphi is physically perfect, but is brainless. *The Girl Who...* is a cyborg narrative that offers a critical evaluation of women and femininity within patriarchy as a representation of disability. For instance, Davis goes on to explain that despite the fact that 'Medusa is the disabled woman to Venus's perfect body', the statues of Venus that have survived from antiquity are, ironically, incomplete, many with missing arms and heads (55). Similarly, Delphi is considered physically perfect, her excessive feminine traits granting her cultural value within patriarchal society. However, analogous to the decapitated statues of Venus, Delphi is a woman without a mind, and is therefore an impaired, castrated figure. When P. Burke is not 'plugged in' living out her dream life, Delphi, the 'spectacular' but brainless doll just 'sleeps' (21, 23).

According to Davis, men fear and guard themselves against the threat of castration, which woman represents, by seeking ways to control her. Part of this obsession involves 'a masculine way of fashioning the female body or remaking her into a conceptual whole' (Davis 56). At the same time, men are reassured that women are subordinate to men because physically (and mentally), in relation to men, women are always incomplete. Davis's analysis of how women are perceived and constructed in patriarchal society is relevant to Tiptree's text when

the narrator explains: 'The fact is she's just a girl, a real live girl with her brain in an unusual place' (18). Delphi is real in that she is made of flesh and blood, but literally without a mind of her own, she is also controllable and malleable. At the time 'The Girl Who...' was published, 'Russ had observed that for women, brains and body cancel each other out: women could be either smart or sexual but never both' (Phillips 335), a view reiterated by Wolf fifteen years later, when she writes: 'Culture stereotypes women to fit the [beauty] myth by flattening the feminine into the beauty-without-intelligence or intelligence-without-beauty; women are allowed a mind or body but not both' (59). Therefore, despite the fact that Delphi is a reconstructed woman who is deemed physically perfect, she is nonetheless a reconstruction that remains subordinate to men, because she signifies woman under the control of patriarchy.

The implications of woman divided between a perfect and imperfect self is outlined further in Wolf's cultural analysis of the representation of women in patriarchal society; 'Male culture seems happiest to imagine two women together when they are defined as being one winner and one loser in the beauty myth' (60). P. Burke and Delphi perform this function, but in this dual role as one woman divided between an imperfect and perfect self, they also allow other interpretations. On one level, 'The Girl Who...' can be read as a critique of women who collude in their own oppression. In order to be successful, women succumb to patriarchal technology, persuading them to consume products that make them more amenable to men. This is portrayed through P. Burke's rejection of her own physically impaired body and her desire to live a new life through Delphi. In order to 'close out the beast she is chained to', P. Burke desperately wants to 'fuse with Delphi' (38). Ultimately, P. Burke not only wants to be like

Delphi, but rather, she wants '*To become Delphi*' (38). However, as Tiptree's narrator explains, P. Burke's desire to do so is 'dumb' (Tiptree 38), because Delphi is an unobtainable ideal which no woman can ever achieve. In Tiptree's text, technology and the feminine are a valuable combination to patriarchy when they are used to subjugate women into a position of competing with one another for the limited spoils patriarchy affords them. On another level, '*The Girl Who...*' serves as a narrative that raises awareness of the hierarchical relationships that not only exist between men and women, but also those that exist between women.

**Women Isolated and Alienated By Patriarchy: 'What women do is survive. We live by one and twos in the chinks of the world machine'**

In contrast to Haraway's optimistic look, and as I have referred to earlier, Tiptree was cynical about women's ability to build an effective alliance. She considered women a divided species, which at best survived within patriarchal culture, rather than thriving as a coherent political group.<sup>15</sup> Women who are isolated and alienated from each other are central themes in her feminist short story '*The Women Men Don't See*' (1973). In this text, two women, a mother and daughter survive a plane crash and are stranded on an unknown coastline with two males, a pilot and another passenger. The story is told from the viewpoint of the male passenger, Don. As the narrative progresses, the female protagonists display survival skills that bring them to Don's attention. Previously, Don had judged the

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<sup>15</sup> As Phillips explains, 'Tiptree's official support for feminism' contrasted sharply with a strong feeling of 'unadmitted hostility toward women' (Phillips 279). Tiptree often doubted that women could really join forces and achieve emancipation. For example, in response to feminist concerns about the lack of structure in the women's movement in the 1970s, Tiptree wonders 'how far the women's movement will go' stating, 'I'm old enough to have lived through the death of the first hopes – in the post-WW2 misery – and I am frightened for this one. It is a wonderful thing to have seen women's liberation reborn, but we have far to go and with so few tools. [...] Also, [...] I have seen something of how power works and I'm terrified of women's innocence' (Phillips 279).



women by their looks, dismissing them as of little importance to him. However, by the end of the narrative, Don is forced to reassess his misogynist attitudes towards the opposite sex. Nonetheless, the two women intend to escape earth on an alien spaceship because the mother, Ruth Parsons, is unconvinced that women will ever be liberated:

Women have no rights, Don, except what men  
allow us. Men are more aggressive and powerful,  
and they run the world. When the next real crisis  
upsets them, our so-called rights will vanish like –  
like that smoke. We'll be back where we always  
were: property. (134)

Ruth is unconvinced that women are even capable of winning their liberation.

Instead, she explains to Don what it means to be a woman in a man's world:

‘What women do is survive. We live by one and twos in the chinks of the world machine’ (134).

In Tiptree's survival narrative, women are divided and isolated from each other by patriarchy. Similarly, in ‘The Girl Who...’, the dual identity of Tiptree's cyborg figure indicates how women are socially divided from each other as well as psychologically alienated from their own bodies. As Heather Hicks has pointed out, it may be argued that P. Burke is that woman surviving within the ‘world machine’ of a male dominated and technologically driven global economy (76). Although ‘The Girl Who...’ is a fictional story, Tiptree does not idealise the lives of women in her narrative but realistically portrays them as entrapped within

patriarchy's structures, suggesting that in order for women to overcome their limitations, it is necessary to change a society which limits them. In 'The Women Men Don't See', Ruth Parsons explains to Don how this may happen: 'Men live to struggle against each other; we're just part of the battlefield. It'll never change unless you change the whole world' (134). Ultimately, according to Tiptree's protagonist, women's liberation is not dependent on their ability to forge political alliances, but rather, it is dependent upon men changing their ways.

This failure of women to connect is discussed by Melissa Coleen Stevenson. Stevenson argues that the cyborg, as represented in C.L. Moore's 'No Woman Born' and Tiptree's 'The Girl Who...', are figures that stand in opposition to Haraway's cyborg theory. Haraway's claim for the cyborg relies on the potential of women to merge with technology in order to connect with others. However, Stevenson argues that Deidre and P.Burke/Delphi are cyborgs that fail in their desire for connectivity and are therefore existentially alone (87). The cyborg as a figure that is alone in the world is a standard trope of science fiction. Often the lonely cyborg represents the human condition in modern society from a male point of view. Therefore, it is unusual to have female protagonists in this central role, expressing such concerns over their existence as women. However, Stevenson considers that the cyborg, as a lone woman in pursuit of individual freedom, compromises the collective political goals required for women's liberation. Ultimately, according to Stevenson, the failure of Tiptree's cyborg to overcome her physical and social limitations is proof that 'The Girl Who...' is a text that stands in opposition to the possibilities which Haraway's cyborg figure represents.

### **Cyborgs Are ‘Needy for Connection’**

I disagree, Haraway argues that the cyborg is ‘wary of holism’ but ‘needy for connection’ (151), meaning that the cyborg is not the transcendental figure that Stevenson claims it to be, but instead is a figure that acknowledges the divisions that exist between women and the importance of finding a strategy for establishing a collective alliance. It is true that Deidre and P. Burke may be women alone in their unique identities as cyborgs, desiring freedom from a society that constrains them, but also, they are, like Haraway’s cyborg figure, women who desire connection with others (151). For example, P. Burke wants to ‘fuse’ with Delphi. Therefore, I consider that Deidre and P. Burke/Delphi are cyborgs that anticipate Haraway’s ‘Cyborg Theory’. As I have argued, Moore and Tiptree provide thought-provoking texts about lone female cyborgs that are representative of women during particular social and political upheavals. In their historical context, Moore’s and Tiptree’s work reflects the real material relations of women and does not pretend to provide clear-cut answers to difficult problems that women face. This, I think, is their appeal. In the case of ‘The Girl Who...’, a text that is strongly linked to second wave feminism, Tiptree was earnest in her engagement with feminist ideas in science fiction, particularly those expressed by Joanna Russ. Tiptree, like Russ, was aware of the constraints imposed upon women by patriarchal society, which she explicitly explores in her cyborg text. It is at this point that I now want to return to the trope of the ugly woman/disabled woman in order to offer a more positive interpretation of ‘The Girl Who...’ by firstly reading the text as an analogy of Tiptree’s divided life as a woman writing under a male pseudonym, and secondly, by reading it as a disruption of heteropatriarchal relations conventionally told through the romantic narrative.

### **Tiptree the (Fe)Male Author: A Cyborg Desiring Connection with ‘Others’**

In her analysis of the rehabilitation of the disabled subject, Barbara E. Gibson discusses the political implications of the disabled subject’s connection with technology, echoing Haraway’s cyborg theory:

Persons with disabilities, and particularly those perpetually connected to life sustaining technologies, may provide a compelling example of this complex hybridization between persons and devices but all contemporary persons are connected cyborgs. This opens up multiple possibilities for ‘reconstructing the boundaries of daily life’ and ‘building and destroying machines, identities, categories (and) relationships.’ (192)

Gibson’s limited but connected cyborg that ‘opens up multiple possibilities’ for a subject to build and destroy ‘identities, categories (and) relationships’ is a useful theoretical construct for analysing Alice B. Sheldon and her guise as the male writer James Tiptree Jr. To explain, the image of the impaired/ugly woman who is merged with technology and desiring connectivity is important for understanding Tiptree’s aspiration for acceptance in a male-dominated science fiction community. Heather Hicks has argued that the physically impaired P. Burke represents Alice Sheldon, the woman behind the pseudonym, while Delphi represents James Tiptree Jr. Hicks says: ‘In this pessimistic reading, the “perfect

girl-body” of the science fiction writer is a male body’ (73). Hicks considers that it is only through a male persona that Tiptree is able to ‘achieve authorial success within the American marketplace’ (73), concluding: ‘[...] Paul’s discovery of her [P. Burke’s] true identity and his disgust with it, suggests a conviction that her [Tiptree’s] “body” of work would not endure the revelation of the female body’ (73).

Hicks’s autobiographical reading of ‘The Girl Who...’ highlights the constraints placed upon writers in terms of their gendered identity, not only by publishers and editors but also by patriarchal society at large. A woman writer publishing under a male pseudonym inevitably raises feminist concerns about the position of the female writer under patriarchy. Why would a woman writer negate her own feminine identity in favour of patriarchy’s masculine ideal? While Tiptree offered various reasons for choosing to write under a male pseudonym, she also conceded that ‘her choice to write as a man was what permitted her the range of themes that made her successful’ (Hicks 73). In a male dominated profession, her guise as a man allowed her to write in a manner that would have otherwise been suppressed. Writing under a male pseudonym allowed Tiptree to work in a style not normally afforded women: it freed Tiptree from the gender constraints imposed upon her sex and allowed her to express her views honestly about gender relations in western society. Through unsentimental, cruel and even violent imagery, Tiptree produced powerful, thought provoking narratives that would have otherwise been deemed unsuitable for a woman writer to create and publish.

When it came to guessing who Tiptree really was, the notion of him being a woman was rarely entertained. Instead, speculation included black, gay, and disabled identities all of which assumed Tiptree was male (Phillips 303, 274-275).

The science fiction community aggressively dismissed the idea that Tiptree may be a woman. Joanna Russ thought it impossible that Tiptree could be a woman because she considered that Tiptree held views about gender that ‘no woman could even think, or understand, let alone assent to’ (Phillips 3). However, more famously Robert Silverberg made the following claim: ‘It has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory that I find absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine in Tiptree’s writing’ (Phillips 2-3). Essentialism distorts the views of Russ and Silverberg about Tiptree’s identity. According to Russ, Tiptree thought like a man and so was a man. Similarly, in Silverberg’s view, Tiptree wrote like a man and therefore, naturally, he was a man.

In the first case, so convincing was Tiptree’s performance that it was difficult for feminists like Russ to imagine Tiptree being other than a man. At the same time, so ingrained was science fiction’s misogynist outlook towards women writers that it was thought impossible that a woman, disguised or not, could write as well as a man – a point made by Tiptree’s biographer Julie Phillips:

There was then, and to some extent still is,  
a persistent feeling both in and out of science  
fiction that women’s writing is different from  
men’s and somewhat less equal [...] Yet men  
who didn’t think they liked fiction by women  
had admired Tiptree, and had acclaimed him  
for the very energy and drive they said women  
lacked. (372-373)

Tiptree's male persona allowed her to demonstrate that a woman could write as well as a man, while also demonstrating that masculinity is performative. Additionally, Tiptree's 'body of work' has 'endured the revelation of a female body'. As Phillips points out, today, feminists make claims for Tiptree's stories as 'proof that there is a women's way of writing', rereading her narratives as being 'fundamentally about women' (373). At the same time, male fans have felt 'that Tiptree has been "stolen from them"' (Phillips 373). It is within this context that Tiptree managed to disrupt and transcend the gender divide that has been used for so long to define value and quality in science fiction literature. It is at this point that I want to consider the implications of Tiptree's disruption of gender identity as a science fiction writer and the theoretical potential this has for unsettling heteropatriarchal conventions through a feminist cyborg writing argued for in Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto'.

According to Haraway, women who engage with writing technology are cyborgs who have the potential to seize 'the tools to mark the world that marked them as other' (175). Through the medium of writing, Haraway proposes that representations have power to influence and mould the individual, meaning that although representations have an existence independent of the material body, they still have an impact upon the lives of real people. Therefore, writing technology allows both author and reader to interact with texts, questioning the way representations impact upon their own and other people's lives. Haraway's argument follows a post-structuralist understanding of how the meanings of texts are far from determined by the author alone. Instead, readers can bring many meanings to a text. For instance, a reader can exchange ideas at the site of a text, opening up a dialogue with it. Consequently, new meanings can be constructed.

Women who came to write science fiction during the 1970s often spoke of their decision to write against the grain – a decision that stemmed from their experience as readers of science fiction pulp magazines during the 1940s and 1950s (Roberts, A New Species 45; Bacon-Smith 96). As Haraway has argued, ‘The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture’ (175). Haraway’s cyborg authors are women writers who engage with the ‘tools’ of ‘stories’ in order to intervene into dominant discourses of technology. Conventionally, dominant discourses of technology are dependent on fixed gender identities of masculine and feminine. However, when women writers ‘reverse and displace’ naturalised identities by writing in a style not normally afforded their gender, the cyborg as writer can potentially be a very powerful figure for intervening into patriarchal ideology.

I consider that Tiptree exemplifies the cyborg author as defined by Haraway in her ‘Cyborg Manifesto’. Tiptree’s decision to write under the guise of a male pseudonym questioned traditional ideas about the gendered writer. Women and men do not necessarily write in a way that betrays an inherent identity that is female or male. Instead, the uncoupling of Tiptree’s female body from her masculine writing potentially unsettles the reader because, as critics such as Sarah Lefanu have argued, her writing is subversive when read in relation to her masquerade as a male writer. Lefanu makes the following claim about Tiptree’s gender reassignment:

Tiptree’s feminist vision in fact appears at its



most powerful and complex in some of the stories that have a male narrator, or where the authorial voice is mediated through a macho world view, even though, or perhaps because, those stories, at least to the woman reader, are the most disturbing. (Lefanu 122)

Through the technology of writing, Tiptree has been able to transcend her gender identity and write in a masculine style that subverts the male dominated sphere of science fiction. Tiptree may have believed in biological determinism, but even her work such as 'The Girl Who...' challenges this view because her narrative highlights that femininity and gender is a social and historical construct not a natural given. In Tiptree's cyborg tale, technology deconstructs patriarchy's timeless image of the ideal woman and disrupts the romantic fairytale ending conducive to patriarchy. Therefore gender dissonance, created through the trope of the physically impaired woman, is important to understanding the subversive power of Tiptree's work.

### **Cyborg Women and Same-Sex Desire: Queering the Mechanical Woman**

In light of Phillips's analysis of Tiptree's gender performance, it may be argued that there is an alternative outcome to Hicks's reading of 'The Girl Who...'. Tiptree was an avid letter writer and her guise as a male author also allowed her to engage in intimate discourses with both male and female science fiction authors. The intimacy that she developed through her epistolary exchange with other writers stood her in good stead. When it was finally revealed that

Tiptree was a woman, she felt able to confess to Russ that she was, after all, ‘a frustrated gay’ to which she adds, ‘Christ how I hate my aging body, the knobby veined claws that once were hands, the seismic collapse of skin around my mouth’ (Phillips 370). In response, Russ makes a ‘pass’ at the now revealed female, Alice B. Sheldon, explicitly explaining her value, both physical and intellectual, to the lesbian community, stating:

I like old women with a very special feeling  
and get all dreamy and erotic about them  
(an indecent proposal by letter!). Honest.  
If you only could locate yourself in some  
youthful Lesbian feminist community [...]  
they would all crowd around you [...] and  
coo softly, patting you in all sorts of places  
and saying admiring things about you until  
you got embarrassed. (Phillips 370)

Despite the fact that Sheldon expresses disgust at her physical self, in this erotic exchange of letters, Russ places aesthetic value on the aging body of another woman. It may be argued that Sheldon, representing the P. Burkes of the world, finds a place in a lesbian community where the feminine is constructed differently and variations of woman are validated and accepted. Therefore, instead of just reading ‘The Girl Who...’ as a straight story about failed love between the sexes, I also consider the story to be about Sheldon’s unrequited love for other women. Throughout Tiptree’s work, the ugly, unconventional woman rejecting the human

male in preference for a life of love with alien 'Others' is a recurring theme. I consider that it is a theme that carries a subtext about Sheldon's repressed desire for other women.<sup>16</sup> Tiptree would often relate countless failed love affairs to Joanna Russ. In fact, these affairs were real examples of Sheldon's own unsuccessful attempts at forging sexual relationships with other women.

Significantly, 'The Girl Who...' is a story involving two women who are intimately intertwined both physically and mentally, but who are also alienated from each other by patriarchy, which presents an opportunity to provide a queer reading of P.Burke's desire to merge with Delphi. In this reading, the tension at the centre of the drama is not so much a fear of being discovered by the male protagonist Paul Isham, but rather it is generated by Sheldon's own unconscious desire to resist heterosexual expectations placed upon the female body. Although Delphi is primarily a tool serving heteropatriarchal desires, the sexual imagery in Tiptree's text is presented as a manifestation of female erotic desire mediated and experienced through the virtual body of another woman. For example, when P. Burke operates the beautiful Delphi for the first time, 'she [P. Burke] can't resist running her hands down over her [Delphi's] mini-breasts and belly' (9). Here the reader is presented with an erotic image of a woman touching herself. It is also an image of a woman touching another woman. Additionally, P. Burke never experiences physical pleasure directly with a man. Instead, P. Burke's body is

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<sup>16</sup> After reading Phillips's biography of Tiptree's life and Tiptree's dialogue with Russ, I read 'The Girl Who...' and Tiptree's science fiction work as narratives about same-sex desire. For instance, the mother and daughter relationship in 'The Women Men Don't See' is, I think, an incestuous mother and daughter relationship. In Phillips's biography, there is an incident recorded where Tiptree's mother makes sexual advances towards her, which she rejects. I read her rejection of her mother as a repression of her own sexual desire for women. Also the narrative of the ugly woman who sees no future for herself with human men on earth and seeks an alternative life with an alien race is a recurring theme in Tiptree's work. In 'With Delicate Mad Hands' (1981), an ugly woman trains hard to become an astronaut in order to meet aliens she has made contact with long ago as a child. She kills the all-male crew, who have treated her appallingly, and takes control of the ship, finding love amongst the stars with an alien species.

awakened to new physical pleasures through the body of Delphi, who is the one who experiences the 'real male arms' of a 'real human male' (37). However, Paul Isham, 'a real human male' does not win the love of Delphi, nor does P. Burke successfully merge with Delphi's body. Instead, Paul is a man who merely does damage to the women in the text, who, on exposure of their illicit coupling, die.

Paul wishes to rescue Delphi but in order to do so he must allow P. Burke to live. The concession to Paul's total possession of Delphi is that he must share her body with another woman. However, Paul is disgusted at the sight of P. Burke and the thought that it is P. Burke who controls Delphi infuriates him, resulting in the death of both women. As it is explained to Paul, 'Mr Isham' [...] 'you have just killed the person who animated the body you call Delphi. Delphi herself is dead.' (54). While death for Delphi is temporary: 'Delphi is nothing but a warm little bundle of vegetative functions hitched to some expensive hardware – the same that sustained her before her life began' (55), P. Burke, 'the monster fastened into little Delphi's brain', is gone forever (53). Paul, I would argue, is representative of heteropatriarchy's social system that prohibits love and intimacy between women, while condemning women who do not conform to standards of acceptable femininity.

As a woman aging in a society that ceaselessly promotes the virtues of youth, Sheldon refused to see herself as a sexually attractive woman because she believed that her body no longer upheld such values. In her discussions with Russ, it is evident that Sheldon considered her female form disfigured and her gender identity a form of impairment. However, as a writer, where appearance and identity can be subverted, Sheldon found a medium through which she was able to connect with others, both women and men. Therefore, re-reading Hick's allegory,

if P. Burke is Alice B. Sheldon, then the androgynous ‘perfect-girl body’ of Delphi is Tiptree’s indeterminate and liminal body of work that appeals to both women and men, and Paul Isham III, is a tragic figure representing a patriarchal system that can do nothing more than divide and damage women. Finally, as a writer, Sheldon is not the lonely cyborg that Stevenson claims her work represents, but is in fact an author who, despite her self-imposed physical isolation from the science fiction community, managed to connect through a meeting of minds, and did so through the blurring of boundaries that defined her bodily identity.

To conclude, by placing Tiptree’s cyborg narrative within the context of 1970s second wave feminism, I have read ‘The Girl Who...’ as a satirical comment on the romantic narrative, told through the trope of the mechanical woman. By subverting a science fiction convention that is obsessed with perfecting the female form, Tiptree’s text engages with feminist issues of the time that were concerned with the perpetuation of the beauty ideal – an ideal encouraging women to collude in their own oppression. The juxtaposition of the physically impaired body with the perfect female form offers a critique of how women are divided by patriarchal ideology. Tiptree’s text offers a cynical image of the cyborg figure. Nonetheless, it is also a critical narrative about women and technology and is, I would argue, a precursor to Haraway’s ‘Cyborg Theory’, which promotes the need for the development of an alliance between women that recognises the root cause of each other’s oppression, while respecting difference.

Finally, by arguing for an understanding of the cyborg author in relation to the presence of women writers in science fiction, it has been possible to present Tiptree as a woman empowered through her gender reassignment as a male writer. Not only did Tiptree’s male guise allow her to write in a manner not usually

afforded women, more importantly, it enabled her to transcend the gender divide that grants unequal value to men and women's writing in science fiction literature. Additionally, by offering a biographical reading of the 'The Girl Who...', through discussing how Tiptree's own divided life intertwines with that of P. Burke and Delphi, it has been possible to establish that the image of the physically impaired woman has been important for understanding woman's desire for connectivity. Rather than reading P. Burke/Delphi as a cyborg who fails to connect, I read it as an allegory of Tiptree's life. In this context, it is possible to argue that the gender dissonance generated by the presence of the cyborg author allowed her to connect with a science fiction community in ways that otherwise would have been difficult to achieve as a woman. Further still, the exchange of letters between Tiptree and Russ suggests that P. Burke, the rejected woman of Tiptree's cyborg text, is valued in a lesbian community that redefines the female mind and body in opposition to patriarchy. The desire for connectivity through bodies that no longer hold value in a patriarchal world is a theme that leads on to the next chapter, where I discuss Joan D. Vinge's novelette 'Tin Soldier' (1974). In this cyborg text, the body in question is the physically impaired male.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Joan D. Vinge's 'Tin Soldier' (1974)**

This thesis explores the ways in which gender and physical impairment intersect in the figure of the cyborg. So far, I have looked at representations of the female cyborg in relation to disability and gender oppression. In this chapter, I continue working within the context of second wave feminism, but this time I explore how gender and physical impairment intersect in the figure of the male cyborg. This chapter marks a shift from the female to male cyborg in women's science fiction. In general, women's focus on the male cyborg reflects a societal shift in attitudes towards gender and an emerging awareness of masculinity as an identity that is suspect and in need of interrogation. More specifically, in this chapter, I argue that the shift in focus from female to male cyborg reflects feminist concerns about its own political survival and the necessity to persuade men that they are also exploited by patriarchy. Joan D. Vinge's novella 'Tin Soldier' (1974) explores this concern and the complexities of gender oppression. 'Tin Soldier' is about a male soldier from a warring culture who is injured in combat and reconstructed into a cyborg. Rejecting war, he travels to another planet where he falls in love with a woman space traveller. However, as a hybrid of human and machine, the cyborg is strange, 'Other' and inferior to the spacer woman because of his physical difference. But, it is not only the cyborg that is 'Other' to the women in Vinge's text, so are men, who merely function to service their sexual needs and desires.

I argue that Vinge reverses the gender politics of traditional science fiction narratives, presenting women as culturally superior to men, in order to highlight

the prevailing prejudices of patriarchal culture in North American society. At the same time, the presence of the male cyborg soldier as physically and socially feminised in Vinge's narrative examines how men are used and oppressed by the patriarchal culture of war. Therefore, I consider that 'Tin Soldier' is a feminist anti-war text that is oppositional to contemporary representations of the male cyborg in science fiction as an invincible fighting machine. In particular, I read Vinge's text in relation to Martin Caiden's popular novel Cyborg (1972), a story about an astronaut called Steve Austin, who survives a plane crash and is reconstructed into a cyborg. Indestructible, he becomes a secret agent working on covert military operations for the government.<sup>17</sup> Caiden's novel celebrates American militarism and perpetuates gender inequality by representing the cyborg as a hypermasculine man-machine who is enhanced by and in control of technology. In contrast, Vinge represents the cyborg soldier as a marginal figure feminised by patriarchal technology who is in search of love and acceptance as a cyborg.

By transforming the military image of the male cyborg – a macho killing machine – into a love machine, I consider that 'Tin Soldier' is a response to Shulamith Firestone's critique of love outlined in her book The Dialectic of Sex (1970). Appropriating themes and images from Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, 'The Brave Tin Soldier' (1838), a story about a physically impaired toy soldier and his unrequited love for a ballerina, Vinge explores the relationship between love and social inequality, producing a narrative that transcends this inequality through the figure of the cyborg. In Chapter Three, the retelling of the

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<sup>17</sup> Caiden's novel provides the blue-print for the most popular image of the male cyborg of the 1970s when Cyborg is adapted into several films for television such as The Six Million Dollar Man (Richard Irving, 1973) and a television series of the same name The Six Million Dollar Man (Kenneth Johnson, 1974-1978).



fairy tale narrative in Tiptree's 'The Girl Who...' offered a critique of women's relationship with technology through a dystopian vision of the cyborg. In this chapter, I argue that Vinge's retelling of Andersen's fairy tale promotes a genderless future through a utopian vision of the cyborg figure.

Significantly Vinge's decision to draw upon Andersen's fairy tale narrative 'Tin Soldier' links her male protagonist to the image of the disabled Vietnam War veteran that emerged in American literary culture during the 1970s. An example is Ron Kovic's Born on the Fourth of July (1976), an autobiography that relates the author's personal experience as a young soldier debilitated in combat while on duty in Vietnam. By offering a comparative reading of Vinge's text with Ron Kovic's Vietnam narrative, I consider Vinge's male cyborg in relation to masculinity and the disabled Vietnam War veteran. The purpose of this reading is to explore the 'remasculinization' of the disabled Vietnam War veteran at a moment when feminism was poised to emerge as a political force. Overall, by offering comparative readings of 'Tin Soldier' with Caiden's Cyborg, Andersen's 'Tin Soldier' and Kovic's Born on the Fourth of July, I argue for the importance of Vinge's text as a feminist intervention into patriarchal ideology that oppressively promotes masculinity through the idealisation of nationhood, manhood and war and the necessity for men to join women in creating a post-patriarchal society. However, to begin, I will discuss the cyborg within the context of Haraway's 'Cyborg Theory'. Here, I will explain the male cyborg as a figure that primarily embodies a feminine identity.

### **The Male Cyborg: Gender Reversals in ‘Tin Soldier’**

Vinge uses the cyborg to reverse the gender politics of traditional science fiction narratives. Haraway’s ‘Cyborg Theory’ primarily concerns women’s relationship with technology, but not exclusively so. Her cyborg figure encompasses those who are feminised and marginalised by patriarchal society and this includes men. In Haraway’s view, men’s relationship with technology is not always empowering. Rather, technology can be economically, socially and culturally emasculating (166). Haraway explains how technology impacts upon the public sphere of work in gendered terms: ‘Work is being redefined as both literally female and feminized, whether performed by men or women...Deskilling is an old strategy newly applicable to formerly privileged workers’ (166). The ‘Deskilling’ of ‘formerly privileged workers’ refers to men who have been adversely affected by technological change. Haraway’s theory accommodates the fact that not all men achieve the Western ideal that defines human identity. Therefore, within patriarchy’s regime of technology, some men are subject to the process of feminization and are marked as ‘Other’. In science fiction literature, identities that are marked as ‘Other’ can take on the form of the alien, the cyborg or the robot. Standing in opposition to the human, which is defined as masculine, able-bodied, organic and whole; the alien, cyborg and robot are alternative identities that women writers have used to explore inequalities generated by physical difference (Lefanu 77).

Joan D. Vinge’s novella ‘Tin Soldier’ is set in the distant future at a space port called New Piraeus located on a distant planet called Oro and concerns a man called Maris. Originally, Maris is from a planet called Glatte, where ‘War is a way of life’ (203). Significantly, New Piraeus means ‘new port’ evoking the

science fiction concept of a space portal or gateway into other worlds. A space port also implies a sea port, a transitional place that exists between two different environments, land and sea, signifying the possibility of new opportunities and change. Maris journeys from Glatte to Oro, planets that are topographically different giving rise to two different cultures. For instance, Glatte means ‘smooth’ or ‘flat’, implying sameness and conformity and is a place dominated by an unchanging macho culture of war, while Oro means ‘mountainous’, suggesting variation and difference and the intermingling of diverse cultures. Arriving at New Piraeus, Maris hopes for a new and better life. However in his new environment, he discovers that his gendered status has changed. On Glatte, Maris means ‘soldier,’ it is a male name with a male role carrying masculine connotations. However, Maris is also a woman’s name that means ‘of the sea’, which alludes to his feminine and marginal status as a social outcast who desires acceptance in an alternative culture.

At the age of nineteen, Maris is blown to pieces and finds himself ‘suddenly half-prosthetic’ (Vinge 244). Physically impaired by war, Maris is reconstructed into a cyborg: ‘More than half his body was artificial’ (201). Technology allows him to live, but after his traumatic experience and ‘hating war’, he decides to leave Glatte (203). When he leaves, Maris realises that, as a cyborg, existing in an environment outside of Glatte’s warring culture, he is marginalised by society: ‘He wakened to Oro, tech one-point-five, no wars and almost no people. And found out that now to the rest of humanity he was no longer quite human’ (245). Maris’s high-tech body is viewed as strange and frightening, but his status as a cyborg is tolerated. In New Piraeus, he owns and runs a bar called ‘Tin Soldier,’ which is frequented by female space travellers. One night he meets

Brandy and falls in love with her. Brandy breaks the ultimate taboo by engaging in a physical sexual liaison with a cyborg. Finally, she falls in love with him.

Brandy is a new 'spacer' woman and tradition demands that she sleeps with the first man who asks her name. Maris is the first to do so. It is a humorous joke that is played by Maris upon a 'greenie,' meaning a new and inexperienced spacer woman (Vinge 203). Maris explains to Brandy that, to the spacer women, he does not count as a man because he is a cyborg: 'I asked your name, you wanted me to; tradition says you lay the guy. But I'm a cyborg, Brandy...' (203). Although the universe in which Vinge's text is set is presented as remote, distant and alien, the language that is adopted to explain the dominant, masculine world of 'spacer' culture evokes the male world of 1970s North America. As a 'greenie', Brandy is presented as an uninitiated spacer woman, meaning that she has not, as yet, foregone the final ritual in order to achieve the masculine status that her rank affords her. Her endeavour to 'lay' a 'guy' is a cultural practice that will bond her to other spacer women, echoing the sexual rituals of western culture that initiates boys into the adult male world of heteropatriarchal society. In Vinge's text, however, rather than women being the feminised object of desire, it is men, as spacer women use them to prove and maintain their dominant position in society. However, Maris is not a man, but a cyborg. His advances towards Brandy are therefore null and void. Nonetheless, Brandy ignores the prejudice of her 'spacer' culture and insists that they spend the night together (204).

Although Maris is male, he is a physically impaired soldier who is reconstructed into a cyborg. Vinge uses this image of the physically impaired male soldier as feminised to reverse gender power relations in her love story. The disabled male has a traditional place in women's writing, working as a literary

device that transfers social and cultural power to the female protagonist (Parker 221-222).<sup>18</sup> In Vinge's imagined universe, women occupy the archetypal male position of space traveller and adventurer, while men are primarily used for pleasure. The male cyborg is 'Other' to the 'spacer' women. Consequently, spacer women enjoy privileges normally reserved for men, while the burden of physical difference is transferred to the male protagonist. In order to emphasise his physical strangeness and marginal identity, the narrative opens with the image of the cyborg:

His face was ordinary, with eyes that were dark  
and patient, and his hair was coppery barbed wire  
bound with a knotted cloth. Under the curling  
copper, under the skin, the back of his skull was a  
plastic plate. The quick fingers of the hand...were  
plastic, the smooth arm was prosthetic. (Vinge 200)

The cyborg's organic body is merged with plastic. The intermingling of prosthetic limbs with body parts disturbs the integrity of his once human body. The ambiguity of his physical make up is mirrored by the ambiguity of the imagery that is used to describe the colour and texture of his hair: '...his hair was coppery barbed wire...' (200). 'Hair' suggests that this part of his body is organic and therefore 'natural'. However, the description 'was coppery barbed wire'

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<sup>18</sup> Rozsika Parker in 'Images of Men' (1980) cites several texts that depict the reversal of gender power relations between a woman and a physically impaired male protagonist. For example, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Shirley* (1849); Dinah M. Craik's *Olive* (1850); Elizabeth Phelps *Avis* (1877); May Sinclair's *The Helpmate* (1907), and Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (1897).

questions this assumption. This description may imply that wires are coming out of Maris's head, and therefore, part of his brain is artificial. However, it may also imply that Maris's brain is wholly organic, but is assisted, and therefore compromised by technology in order to control the prosthetic parts of his reconstructed body. Vinge uses language and imagery to blur the boundaries that separate mind from body, human from machine, masculine from feminine, indicating the disruption that technology has upon the human male, emphasising the strangeness and 'Otherness' of his identity.

The cyborg's 'Otherness' is further underscored by the fact that he is not referred to by his real name but is only known as 'Soldier' (Vinge 200). It is a label that socially and physically distances him from the spacer women, denying him any intimacy with them. It is a name that singles him out as being different from the spacer women as well as the other male inhabitants of the planet. At the same time, the language that Vinge uses alludes to the cyborg's military origins and his former masculine status. For instance, the 'barbed wire' that describes Maris's hair evokes an image of war. Also, his identity as 'Soldier' is a reminder of his original function, which is to kill, and that men, in general, are trained to be killing machines by the army. However, in Vinge's narrative, the cyborg soldier is a social outcast and is feminised, while women occupy a position of male power. This social hierarchy separating the two identities allows Vinge to highlight and explore the gender bias in patriarchal society.

Vinge's text is oppositional to contemporary cyborg texts written by male writers that glorified patriarchal masculinity and American militarism through the invincible figure of the male cyborg. Of significance is Martin Caiden's Cyborg, a novel which follows the plight of astronaut Steve Austin who is critically injured

in a plane crash and reconstructed into a cyborg. Famously, Caiden's Cyborg entered the popular imagination of the American public through the television series The Six Million Dollar Man (Kenneth Johnson, 1974-1978), offering a fantasy of the American male body as vulnerable, yet indestructible, with technology enabling him to fight for and defend American values and interests around the globe. Initially, Austin struggles with the prospect of his new identity. However, through an extensive rehabilitation programme, he eventually comes to terms with the prostheses that give him enhanced powers and a new role in life as a secret agent. An important factor in the rehabilitation of Austin is the reconstruction of his masculinity in order to reassert male authority over technology and his environment.

Before his accident, Austin was an elite American male, a former combat pilot and astronaut, and an eligible bachelor who was 'adept' with women, while also 'elusive beyond the bedroom door' (Caiden 102-103). Austin is the ultimate patriarchal fantasy of the ideal American male. He is a man who works hard and plays hard and is successful in a career that most men can only dream of doing. However, after his accident, Austin, the man, is virtually destroyed. He is a 'triple amputee' who is 'blind in one eye' (41). Castrated and diminished, his body is feminised compromising his masculinity. Nonetheless, the fact that Austin is capable of surviving such a crash suggests his invincibility. As he recovers, his doctor marvels at a man who can demonstrate 'the marvellous flexibility of the human being' (79), implying Austin's willingness to adapt to his new, if challenging, situation. For example, Austin designs a table that gives him a level of self-sufficiency allowing him to partake in manly activities, such as smoking a cigar:

From left to right it [the table] featured a series of vises and clamps to give him the gripping or clasping ability now denied to him through the loss of his left arm and hand. At the moment he was preparing a cigar, which he had clamped in a rubber grip. He sliced off the end with a razorblade, then removed the wrapper with his right hand. He gripped the cigar in his teeth, lit up with a butane lighter, and blew a cloud of blue smoke in the direction of the doctor. (79)

In the Introductory Chapter, and Chapter One, I discussed the male amputee in relation to the reconstruction of masculinity within the context of World War II. In particular, I drew upon the image of the disabled male subject depicted using a prosthetic arm to smoke a cigarette. I argued that this image promoted men possessing a natural affinity with technology that enabled them to overcome adversity and their physical limitations. Equally, this image of Austin's ingenuity and adeptness with tools and technology serves a similar function. Austin is a man facing extreme adversity. By preparing and smoking a cigar, he performs a male ritual that begins to reconstruct and reassert his masculinity. The successful merging of Austin's body with technology underpins this masculine image: 'Human and human-made were brought together, connected, spliced, wired, sealed. Raw flesh was treated and joined with what was not flesh so that the two might function together as the human entity had performed before the



limbs were mutilated and severed' (Caiden 98-99). Here, Austin is made whole again. He is a 'human entity' once more. However, Austin's human-ness is dependent on his desirability as a man. Although Austin is comfortable with his human-machine identity 'in a masculine world, when he is with men, among men, competing or working with them' (140), he does not believe that he is 'a complete man' because he considers that he is 'impotent' (140). Austin's greatest fear is that women will reject his 'half-man and half-machine condition' and does not 'dare to expose himself to the possibility of a woman turning away from him' (141). To remedy this fear, he is provided with a beautiful nurse called Kathy to care for him and who immediately falls in love with him. It is not until Austin proves to himself that he still possesses skills as a pilot that he finally succumbs to her demand that he make love to her, completing his recovery and self-belief that he is a whole man again.

Therefore, although Austin is rebuilt with a specific function in mind, to be a 'super-agent' for the American secret service (Caiden 154), the reconstruction of Austin's heteropatriarchal masculinity is central to Caiden's narrative. Kathy's desire for him is crucial because it signifies society's complete acceptance of his man-machine body. Significantly, it is Kathy's love for Austin and her willingness to subordinate herself to his needs that finally reinstates his masculinity. Austin's physical difference does not make him strange or 'Other' to men or women. Instead, he is a 'new breed' of human who is superior to them (144). This is proved through his ability to command control over the machine parts that constitute his cyborg identity, the sophisticated high-tech machinery that he will have to work with, and finally women. Stereotypically, women and machinery are encoded as feminine and 'Other' to Austin's superior masculine

identity. Therefore, in Caiden's militaristic world of male cyborg 'super-agents' and Cold War espionage, Austin's affinity with technology sustains the gendered social order, maintaining gender inequalities, by subordinating women and technology to men's needs.

## Love

In contrast, Vinge examines and destabilises the inequalities that exist between women, men and cyborgs by drawing upon Shulamith Firestone's analysis of love. In her book The Dialectic of Sex (1970), Firestone declares: 'For love, perhaps even more than childbearing, is the pivot of women's oppression today... *Women and Love are underpinnings. Examine them and you threaten the very structure of culture*' (142). Firestone states that the subject of 'Love' is 'recreated' within patriarchal culture through literature and philosophy, relegating it to a personal emotional issue. Consequently, romantic love has never been fully understood in its wider social context as an instrument of women's oppression. For Firestone, an analysis of 'Love' is of political importance, because through romantic love, women negate their own needs for those of men. As she writes: '(Male) Culture was built on the love of women, and at their expense' (143). Firestone means that through the emotional support of women, men acquire greater power over women. She concludes, '*(male) culture is parasitical, feeding on the emotional strength of women without reciprocity*' (143). This, I would argue is evident in Caiden's cyborg text when Austin's desire for self esteem depends upon the emotional support of Kathy and her unconditional love for him. In return, Kathy simply disappears from the narrative as Austin embarks on his first covert military operation. Overall, as Firestone

argues, love perpetuates inequality between the sexes and in turn, inequality between the sexes distorts love: 'I submit that love is...corrupted or obstructed *by an unequal balance of power*' (146). This inequality leads on to how men treat women in patriarchal culture. This treatment takes on two forms.

Firstly, in order to make safe the incest taboo, Firestone argues that a man 'must degrade... woman so as to distinguish her from the mother' (147). Secondly, in order to fall in love, 'A man must idealize one woman over the rest in order to justify his descent to a lower caste' (148). For instance, in Caiden's text, the idealization of Kathy over other women is important in reinstating Austin's masculinity. At the same time, the purpose of reconstructing Austin's masculinity is to subordinate the feminine 'Other' part of his cyborg identity to his control in order to become an efficient killing machine. Therefore, within patriarchal culture, love takes on a form that is unsatisfactory to both men and women. Firestone concedes that her alternative to patriarchy's 'false idealization' of love is similarly idealistic, but when discussed within the terms of equality, the love she describes proposes a different outcome:

Love is being psychically wide-open to another.  
It is a situation of total vulnerability. Therefore it  
must be not only the incorporation of the other,  
but an *exchange* of selves. Anything short of a  
mutual exchange will hurt one or the other party.  
(144-145)

Important for my argument about Vinge's text in that it is a political treatise on romantic love for promoting equality between the sexes is Firestone's assertion that love is a 'situation of total vulnerability', where 'the lover "opens up" to the other', in 'an *exchange* of selves' (149). In her analysis it appears that the psychological and, therefore, physical boundaries separating men from women require some form of dissolution of the self. In Vinge's text, the hybrid identity of the cyborg figure reflects Firestone's call for 'an *exchange* of selves', offering an alternative ideal of love beyond patriarchy. At the same time, Vinge's cyborg text pre-empts Haraway's politically charged, postmodern cyborg figure.

Haraway states:

But there are also great riches for feminists in explicitly embracing the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar distinctions structuring the Western self. It is the simultaneity of breakdowns that cracks the matrices of domination and opens geometric possibilities. What might be learned from personal and political 'technological' pollution? (174)

Haraway is excited about the symbolic value of the cyborg to breakdown the distinctions that discursively construct the 'Western self' encoded as human, masculine and male. According to Haraway, without clear distinctions to define self and 'Other', systems of gender power relations are questioned offering the

possibility of change. For example, the cyborg, as a body compromised by technology, is a feminised vulnerable self that incorporates the 'Other'. In 'Tin Soldier', the male cyborg is the vulnerable lover, and Brandy's desire for him thus evokes the emotional condition technophilia, the erotic desire to merge with technology, where a self openly embraces and loves the technological 'Other' that then becomes an integral part of the self. In this respect, Vinge's cyborg breaks down distinctions between human and machine, male and female, masculine and feminine, self and 'Other'. Transforming the military image of the male cyborg – a macho killing machine that in science fiction rejects the feminine 'Other', by obliterating or possessing it, Vinge instead provides the reader with a love machine. In Vinge's novella, the cyborg is a metaphor representing a desire for mutual love between the sexes, which is argued for in Firestone's text. It is a love based on equality, which, in 'Tin Solder', is ultimately expressed through physical difference. The love that develops between Maris and Brandy is special because it is a love that transcends the uneven gendered power relations which pervade Vinge's imagined world.

Individual and group differences structure Vinge's narrative.

Relationships are hierarchical according to physical difference. Vinge organises this hierarchy in opposition to science fiction conventions, where women are not only in a social position of dominance and power over cyborgs, but also over men in general. The reason for this reversal in social hierarchy is centred upon woman's physical suitability for space travel: 'After it was determined that men were physically unsuited to spacing, and women came to a new position of dominance as they monopolized this critical area...' (Vinge 203). 'Space' is Vinge's imagined environment where women have come to dominate men – it is

an environment that disables and feminizes men, while enabling and masculinizing women. The uneven relationship that has emerged between the spacer women and men is defined as a historical development, where technology has allowed women to live in the new and separate environment of space.

Like Haraway's cyborg text, Vinge's narrative represents women as enabled by technology. Women's rise to power, however, is not based upon technology alone, but it is the emergence of a new environment favouring the biological make-up of the female body. In this presentation, biological differences separate women from men. Within patriarchal culture, discourses of biology and physical difference usually relegate women to a subordinate position to men. However, in Vinge's alternate vision, it is now the reverse that is true. Through the presence of the cyborg figure in her text, Vinge offers a narrative that adds complexity to the man versus woman debate. In her 'Cyborg Manifesto', Haraway discusses how cyborgs in feminist science fiction offer something new to conventional discourses concerned with the man/woman dichotomy. Haraway claims that 'Cyborg monsters in feminist science fiction define quite different political possibilities and limits from those proposed by the mundane fiction of Man and Woman' (180). In light of Haraway's discussion, I consider that the reversal of gender roles in 'Tin Soldier' is a critical comment by Vinge about the limits of the man/woman dichotomy in science fiction literature. At the same time, Vinge uses the reversal of gender roles as a narrative device to illuminate and comment upon contemporary cultural prejudices that are based upon physical difference. It is through the cyborg figure that Vinge proposes alternative political possibilities conducive to feminism by resolving the differences that separate the two lovers.

## **Han Christian Andersen's 'The Brave Tin Soldier' (1838): Re-telling Fairy Tales and Alternative Endings**

This resolution of differences that is conquered by love is told through Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale 'The Brave Tin Soldier' (1838). 'Tin Soldier' openly borrows from Andersen's fairy tale. When Brandy asks Maris why his bar is called 'Tin Soldier', the connection is made between Vinge's text and Andersen's fairy tale when Maris explains, 'Sort of private joke, I guess. It was a book of folk tales I read, *Andersen's Fairy Tales*' (Vinge 233). Andersen's fairy tale tells of a toy soldier who is set apart from the other toy soldiers because he is physically different:

There were once five-and-twenty tin soldiers,  
who were all brothers, for they had been made  
out of the same old tin spoon...The soldiers  
were all exactly alike, excepting one, who had  
only one leg; he had been left to the last, and  
then there was not enough of the melted tin to  
finish him, so they made him to stand firmly on  
one leg, and this caused him to be remarkable.  
(Andersen 1)

The tin soldier falls in love with a beautiful ballerina. He sees that the ballerina is standing on one leg and he misrecognises her as being like himself, exclaiming: 'That is the wife for me' (Andersen 1). However, the tin soldier is of a lower social order than his ballerina love: '...she is too grand, and lives in a

castle, while I only have a box to live in...' (Andersen 1). In Andersen's story, the tin soldier's physical difference is conflated with his social limitations and the tale ends in tragedy. The soldier desires what he is not allowed to have and is punished by being thrown into a fire by a little boy. As fate would have it, the ballerina is blown into the fire by a draught of air and burns alongside the tin soldier. The tin soldier melts into the shape of a heart and there is nothing left of the ballerina except a small flower burnt to a cinder:

The tin soldier melted down into a lump, and  
the next morning, when the maid servant took  
the ashes out of the stove, she found him in the  
shape of a little tin heart. But of the little dancer  
nothing remained but the tinsel rose, which was  
burnt black as a cinder. (Andersen 3)

Significantly, it is the narrative's transformation of inanimate materials such as the tin spoon into a tin soldier and the tin soldier into a tin heart that gives life and social meaning to the protagonists in the story. Tin is a base metal, which is transformed into an object of value, a heart, revealing the precious gift of love that is hidden within the soldier's inner self (Tatar 223; Biedermann 166; Mylius 171). Materially, the ballerina is socially superior to the tin soldier, however, spiritually, she is impoverished (Mylius 171). All that is left of the ballerina is a black cinder, signifying her inability to return his love. Symbolically the heart represents the eternal values of love that endure beyond the material world, while the ballerina is lost forever.



This interplay and alternation between the animate and inanimate world in Andersen's fairy tale subvert the hierarchical material values that hold the soldier in his subordinate position. However, despite the soldier's admirable qualities, in life, he goes unrewarded. It is only in death that the soldier is transformed into something of value. Ultimately, in 'The Brave Tin Soldier', the soldier's object of desire is unobtainable and subsequently, both are destroyed reflecting, as some critics argue, Andersen's own feelings of deficiency amongst the women and men of the bourgeoisie with whom he desired to exist alongside as an equal (Haahr 497). At the end of Andersen's tale, the association of the 'tinsel rose' with death is also symbolic of the possibility of transformation and new beginnings, which Andersen also desired. For instance, the rose is linked to the Greek myth of Adonis and is as Hans Biedermann describes 'symbolic of love that transcended death and of resurrection itself' (289). Additionally, as Jens Andersen argues, 'In Andersen's universe death is not a painful and traumatic ending to life but an optimistic and promising beginning' (539). Therefore, while 'The Brave Tin Soldier' symbolizes Andersen's resignation and subservience to the dominant social order, Vinge's version draws upon Andersen's desire for an alternative ending and explores this through the transformative potential of love.

Vinge's story does not end in tragedy. Instead, as Maris suggests to Brandy, 'A footnote said that sometimes the story had a happy ending; I like to believe that' (Vinge 233). In this alternative happy ending to Andersen's tale, the soldier and ballerina both fall into the fire and become fixed to the metal base upon which the soldier stands – the base is reshaped by the fire into a heart, indicating that despite their social and physical differences, they are united through love. Similarly, Maris and Brandy are also finally united in love, but as

equals. Brandy is injured in an accident in her spaceship: fire damages her body and she returns to Maris reconstructed as a cyborg. Bound to the earth, Brandy is considered as good as dead by the other 'spacer' women. However, as a cyborg, she is able to spend the rest of her days with Maris (247-248). As she explains, 'They tell me I may live for hundreds of years...I *am* a whole woman, but they forbid me to go into space again' (247). Maris and Brandy are united through their shared identity as cyborgs. However, they are both marginalised socially because of their physical difference.

Sarah Lefanu has criticised Vinge for an ending which she considers to be 'not entirely satisfactory' (78). Lefanu argues that 'science fiction opens up a space for the portrayal of romantic relationships that are free from the exigencies of contemporary sex-polarised society' (78). However, she finds it problematic that all we are left with is 'a crippled cyborg' (78). For Lefanu, Maris and Brandy possess bodies that are marginal and de-valued by society and reasons: 'Perhaps the problem lies in the object of the search: Romantic love' (78). However, I would argue that Lefanu misses the significance of the trope of physical impairment in Vinge's work. Firstly, Vinge utilises the figure of the physically impaired male to explore the marginalised identity of women and the feminine 'Other' in patriarchal society. Secondly, within the context of Firestone's work, Vinge's choice to focus upon love is a political and serious attempt to use science fiction tropes to think beyond inequality that exists between the sexes. Finally, Lefanu fails to grasp the importance of Vinge's re-telling of a fairy tale that proposes an alternative ending through the transformation of Brandy into a cyborg figure.

Literary critic Jack Zipes argues for the significance of the fairy tale in contemporary culture and the power of ‘reutilizing’ stories ‘for a radical critique of present-day capitalism in all its postmodern and postindustrial forms’ (236). Drawing upon the work of David Gross, Zipes explains that ‘reutilization’ is the ‘extracting and rearranging of elements from within the capitalism system in order to set them against capitalism itself’ (236). The subversive potential of the retelling of the fairy tale narrative that Zipes describes is strikingly similar to Haraway’s discussion of ‘cyborg writing’ and her argument for the necessity of women to seize ‘the tools to mark the world that marked them as other’ (Haraway 175). As Haraway explains, ‘The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities’ (175). In Haraway’s manifesto, the cyborg storyteller contributes to the ‘utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender’ (150). Likewise, Zipes promotes the critical potential of reutilizing the fairy tale by explaining that ‘The appeal of fairy tales still has a great deal to do with utopian transformation and the desire for a better life’ (106). Significantly, Zipes locates the emergence of the critical re-evaluation of the fairy tale narrative in American culture as a phenomenon of the 1970s:

Ever since the 1970s in America professional storytellers and storytellers who represent ethnic minority groups and the feminist movement have realized more than ever before that something was amiss in the way traditions and traditional stories are being passed down the generations [...]. (239-240)

Here Zipes marks a period when political movements, such as feminism, reutilised fairy tales in order to seize upon their transformative potential. In Vinge's 'Tin Soldier' the fairy tale is retold as a cyborg narrative in order to imagine a better life in a world without gender.

By reutilising 'The Brave Tin Soldier', Vinge deploys a critical stance towards the social and cultural constraints of Andersen's fairy tale, subverting his faithful adherence to the social mores of his time. In Andersen's version of 'The Brave Tin Soldier', the soldier's metamorphosis does not overcome the material relations that deny him equality and separate him from his object of desire. Instead, his transformation only serves to emphasise his difference and social alienation until, finally, negating his existence. In contrast, the transformative power of love in Vinge's text brings two marginal subjects together because of difference and they live to share the hope for a better life. To explain further, in 'Tin Soldier', the spacer women are gendered masculine in their physical capabilities and social status. They represent the status of the human male in patriarchal culture. Brandy considers herself 'a whole woman' but as a cyborg, existing in the privileged world of the female 'spacer' culture, she is now a socially 'castrated' spacer woman, who has been 'Othered' and feminised by technology. Significantly, Sigmund Freud saw women as 'castrated men' implying that their biological difference placed them in an inferior social position to men in patriarchal culture (Gay 630). It is not so much Brandy's cyborg identity that compromises her abilities but rather it is the attitude of the dominant culture towards her physical difference that compromises her social status. When Brandy experiences this disempowerment, she realises the absurdity of her exclusion, as she becomes a victim of the 'archaic laws' that have been used to

constrain and limit the lives of both cyborgs and men. Brandy and Maris are not ‘crippled’ in the sense that they are physically disabled, they are instead individuals bound by an ideology that socially disables them in order to protect the lives of a privileged few. In this context, Brandy is an empathic figure that stands for all who are marginalised by society, because of physical difference. At the same time, Brandy’s new identity as a cyborg is an attempt by Vinge to look beyond the power relations that are based upon the hierarchical gendered binary of male and female.

### **A Genderless Future**

Haraway’s cyborg theory aims to eradicate the root of patriarchal oppression by identifying and overcoming the limitations of gendered language, starting with the figure of the cyborg. Haraway proposes that the cyborg is ‘a hybrid of organism and machine’ (149), a figure that confuses the boundaries structuring gender identity. ‘The cyborg’ Haraway affirms ‘is a creature in a post-gender world’ (150), because the cyborg is a trope that has the potential to transcend traditional gender identities defined within patriarchal society. Vinge’s ‘Tin Soldier’ reflects the problems associated with gender identity. At the same time, Vinge’s narrative is not concerned with remedying the problems associated with gender identity as it has been defined within patriarchal culture, nor does her text suggest that a mere reversal in power will rid society of hierarchies that are structured by gender. Instead, ‘Tin Soldier’ proposes that if equality between the sexes is to be realised, then a new identity, other than the human, is needed. Modern society has defined identity through the idealised figure of the human male, encoded as masculine, from which all other identities deviate, and are

encoded as feminine. Through this classification, gendered identities generate values that create a hierarchy between women and men, which ultimately are based upon physical difference. It is an ideological system that justifies inequality between the sexes. Therefore, I would argue that Vinge's narrative is occupied with the problem of how to transcend the all-pervasive presence of gender ideology that permeates and serves the interests of patriarchy not just reverses it.

I believe that in her love story Vinge is proposing that the identity of the cyborg is an alternative and potentially genderless option to that of the human. Maris and Brandy are male and female, and in Vinge's text gendered feminine and masculine respectively, but when Brandy is reconfigured as a cyborg, Maris and Brandy become physically and socially equal. It is within this context that Maris and Brandy are not merely 'crippled cyborgs' but are, instead, figures who have become 'Other' through technology and serve as a model for an alternative but inclusive identity, which is encoded as feminine. Haraway has argued that the cyborg is both feminine and 'Other', but the feminine identity of the cyborg is also empowering because it is a figure that deconstructs the human, uncoupling a culturally constructed gender identity from the organic body. The physically impaired bodies of Maris and Brandy, to use Haraway's words, are 'disassembled' and 'reassembled' through technology. Their bodies have become fragmented and now possess a hybrid identity that has the potential to transcend traditional gender identities. This in turn disrupts the human, which is encoded as masculine and the gendered hierarchy that holds this exclusive identity in place.

## **‘Tin Soldier’ and the Vietnam War**

So far, I have argued for an understanding of the male cyborg as a figure that is feminised, serving as a trope that speaks for those marginalised within patriarchal society, particularly women. Nevertheless, having argued this point, I now want to read Vinge’s cyborg in relation to masculinity and the disabled Vietnam War veteran. Vinge’s choice to draw upon Andersen’s fairy tale links her work to the Vietnam War. Her narrative draws directly from the image of the disabled Vietnam War Veteran that emerged in American culture during the 1970s. Her text was published at a moment when the term ‘Tin Soldier’ held a prominent place in North America’s conscience. ‘One Tin Soldier’ was an anti-war song, which was recorded by the Canadian pop group ‘Original Caste’ in 1969 and became popular with the counter-culture scene. The song was re-recorded by the North American band ‘Coven’ and used as the theme song for the 1971 film Billy Jack, which was about a ‘half-breed’ American Indian Vietnam War Veteran. Apart from the film being about the deeds of the main protagonist, Billy Jack, the film also raised awareness about the plight of Native Americans. It is within this context that ‘One Tin Soldier’ became associated with those marginalised by American society. Between 1973 and 1974, towards the end of the Vietnam War, ‘One Tin Soldier’ resurfaced as a popular anti-war song. Testifying to the popularity of the song, ‘One Tin Soldier’ was named ‘Number One All Time Requested Song of 1971 and 1973 by the American Radio Broadcasters Association’ (Wikipedia 1: Songfacts 1).

The lyrics of ‘One Tin Soldier’ are about two groups of people who fight over hidden treasure. When the victorious group emerge to claim the spoils of war, the treasure simply states “Peace on Earth.” The song is a rejection of

violence, but by the time the Vietnam War was over and the veterans returned home, the song came to represent a rejection of those who took part in the conflict. Returning veterans, particularly those physically impaired by the war, did not come home to a hero's welcome, but were instead treated as social pariahs. Martin F. Norden argues that filmmakers rewrote history and placed the blame for the Vietnam War 'on a few self-destructive and "Otherized" soldiers – to make them bear... "the stigma of guilt for the whole society"...' (108). Unlike the disabled veterans of World War II, who were portrayed as having earned their citizenship through their commitment and self-sacrifice, the disabled Vietnam War veteran's rehabilitation into society was less straightforward. The Vietnam conflict was unpopular and, further, was perceived to be an un-winnable war that blighted America's liberal ideals and military history. While there was a concerted effort to restore the masculine status of the physically impaired veteran of World War II because he was deemed worthy, which I have discussed in detail in Chapter One, the disabled Vietnam War veteran was considered a problematic figure.

Similarly, in Caiden's Cyborg, the problematic image of the disabled Vietnam War veteran is raised and dismissed through his cyborg hero, Steve Austin. Austin is a former combat pilot who has served in the Vietnam War. However, Austin is 'sickened' by the war which he describes as a 'bloody carnage' (Caiden 102). Importantly, Austin is not tainted by his service in Vietnam. He is there doing his duty serving his country, but he also disapproves of the way the War is being fought. Providence is on the side of Austin when he receives the 'million-dollar wound' (Caiden 102), a wound that is neither fatal nor will it permanently cripple him. Instead, Austin loses limbs and is disabled while



working as a test pilot for NASA not as a Vietnam War veteran. His commitment and self-sacrifice is associated with advancing space technology for the good of humankind and, of course, America. Unlike the disabled Vietnam War veteran, Austin does not ‘bear the stigma of guilt for the whole society’. Instead, it is made clear that he stands apart from the men who are ‘torn up, busted, burned, and ripped’ in a war that has produced an ‘army of legless and armless men’ (Caiden 149-151). Ultimately, the image of the disabled Vietnam War veteran is denounced in Caiden’s book because it is an image that does not fit the heroic ideal of the invincible American male bearing the masculine values of American society like Steve Austin does – a pro-military figure who is worthy of reconstruction and ready to fight for American ideals as a cyborg secret agent.

In contrast, through the image of the ‘Otherized’ War Veteran, Vinge’s text raises issues of maleness and masculinity at a moment when feminism threatened to emerge as a social and political force. It is within this context that the reconstruction of the physically impaired war veteran’s masculinity has wider implications for women and feminism. In Vinge’s text, Maris understands that his status as a man, which has been impaired by war and reconstructed into a cyborg, not only makes him subordinate to spacer women but also positions him outside the world of men. Maris was once a man, who lived on a planet where ‘War was a way of life’ (Vinge 203). In an intimate discussion between Brandy and Maris, Brandy enquires whether the male attraction for war was ‘An attempt to reconcile the blow to the masculine ego?’ (203) Brandy explains that the culture of war emerged as a response to woman’s rise to power: ‘As a result, many new and not always satisfactory cultural systems are evolving in the galaxy...One of these is what might be termed a backlash of exaggerated *machismo* ...and the rebirth of

the warrior/chattel tradition' (203). In this passage, Vinge presents two opposing ideologies that were emerging at the time, namely feminism and the backlash to feminism. In her text, Vinge warns that just as women are about to reap the rewards of feminism, the response from patriarchy is to reinforce the masculine status of men in order to contain women. However, with respect to the disabled Vietnam War veteran, the form that this containment took was very different to that which took place during and after World War II.

In his article on the disabled Vietnam War veteran, Martin Norden analyses Oliver Stone's film Born on the Fourth of July (1989), offering examples of how women are represented in Vietnam War texts. Images of women during the Vietnam War were highly problematic, because they were presented as figures that took on the guise of either 'the demon,' such as the overbearing mother (who has coerced her son to go into a futile and unpopular war), 'the whore' (who will only have physical contact with a disabled veteran because she is paid to), or the 'do-nothings' (Norden 106). The 'do-nothings' are women who play no role in the 'remasculinization' of the disabled veteran. This is in stark contrast to the women in Caiden's novel, where women are central in reaffirming Steve Austin's masculine identity by desiring sexual intimacy with him. However, Norden explains that Vietnam War narratives explore the remasculination of the disabled veteran in a different way. Norden argues that Born on the Fourth of July "restores the privileged place of the male hero by appealing to...what Freud called 'the rescue fantasy' in which the male hero gains authority by 'rescuing the nation, figured as a woman, from its own weakness' (102). Freud's rescue fantasy originally appeared in the paper 'A Special Type of Choice of Object Made By Men' (1910). In this paper Freud discusses how men rationalise their erotic desire

for women whose 'sexual integrity' is viewed as suspect by placing 'the *highest value*' on 'women with this characteristic' (167). As Freud explains, 'The man is convinced that she is need of him, that without him she would lose all moral control and rapidly sink to a lamentable level. He saves her, therefore, by not giving her up' (168). The rescue fantasy is centred round the drama of the fallen woman, which stems from a boy's relationship with his mother. It is a moment when a boy discovers that his mother shares an erotic relationship with his father and realises that he is not at the centre of his mother's affection. Consequently, the boy endeavours to salvage his own self-worth and his mother's integrity by engaging in a fantasy of rescuing her from the father and hence, rescuing her from herself. Through the 'rescue fantasy', Norden emphasises the importance of feminine imagery in the representation of America in crisis, because it is a reading that transfers masculine agency to the impaired male protagonist of the Vietnam War narrative, which previously has been ignored (103).

Born on the Fourth of July is an adaptation of Ron Kovic's autobiography of the same title (1976). Norden's reading of Kovic's gendered identity in the film is equally applicable to Kovic's gendered identity in the book, where Kovic's determination to regain his manhood is based upon a mission to 'reclaim America' as well as 'a bit of ourselves' (Kovic 169). Kovic is a nineteen-year-old soldier, serving in Vietnam. He is paralysed from the chest down when a bullet enters his upper body, severing his spinal cord, becoming one of the many young men of a generation who have ironically lost their manhood in a profession that is supposed to reinforce this masculine status. Similarly, Maris represents the marginal status of the physically impaired Vietnam War Veteran. When Maris believes that Brandy has died in the ship's fire, he begins to dwell on a future without her and

the lifelong alienation he has been subjected to. Bitterly, he recalls the moment he sustained his injuries in war:

And the memory filled him of how it felt to  
be nineteen, and hating war, and blown to  
pieces...to find yourself suddenly half-prosthetic,  
with the pieces that were gone still hurting in  
your mind; and your stepfather's voice, with  
something that was not pride, saying you were  
finally a real man [...]. (Vinge 244-5)

While Vinge's text precedes the publication of Born on the Fourth of July, this excerpt reads like a passage out of Kovic's memoir of the Vietnam War. Kovic was a well-known public figure in the early 1970s that protested, with other disabled War Veterans, against the Vietnam War. Therefore, Vinge would have been aware of Kovic. In this context, I believe that Maris's feminine cyborg status is an explicit representation of the Vietnam War Veteran. He is a man whose impaired body is out of place in a male dominated culture, where war underpins the values that constitute masculine identity.

Kovic, the physically impaired war veteran, is like Vinge's male protagonist Maris. They are soldiers who are allowed to live because of advances made in medicine. Technological intervention has given them life, but they possess an identity where the animate and inanimate come together in one body. Maris's identity creates a sense of unease in those around him. The most disturbing aspect of Maris's identity is the liminality of his body. Maris is a

cyborg and is considered to be no longer a living man. It is only technology that animates what is left of his organic body. Maris's liminal identity is unsettling to the spacer women. When Brandy informs Maris that she has discussed their night together with the other spacer women, Maris assures her that her action will not overcome their xenophobia. As Maris states: '[...] to most people in most cultures cyborgs are unnatural, the next thing up from a corpse' (Vinge 205). To the spacer women, Brandy's transgression is a perversion. As Maris explains to her to sleep with a cyborg, 'You'd have to be a necrophile' (Vinge 205).

For Kovic, the sense of unease generated by his body is expressed as a personal experience. Kovic is estranged from his body and he describes this estrangement as like being alive, but also dead. 'I am the living death', Kovic writes in his ironic take on George M. Cohan's patriotic song 'Yankee Doodle Dandy' (1904). Kovic emphasises how hard he has worked to make his body strong in order to be like 'the muscle-men in the "ads" of the "Superman comics"' (Kovic 70). In order to protect the values of American society, Kovic works for a body that will be invincible in the fight against the communist threat, but all he possesses now is a body that is no more than an 'empty corpse' (Kovic 150). Maris and Kovic possess bodily qualities that make them social outcasts. However, Maris and Kovic possess identities that are resolved in different ways. While Maris rejects war and finds solace in love, accepting his feminised identity and making alliances with those who are like him, Kovic continues his soldiering by turning the Vietnam War into his own personal war against the American government. Therefore, Kovic does not reject patriarchal culture as such but rather redeems himself and his fellow veterans through the heroic act of demonstrating against a government he no longer believes in.

Vinge provides the reader with a male subject who questions the warring masculine culture that has marginalised him. Problematically, as Norden points out, Kovic's narrative does not question patriarchal society and war, but instead perpetuates patriarchal values by reclaiming his rights as an American citizen, encoded as masculine. Ultimately Kovic's successful return to American society is determined by his bid to rescue America and himself from a weakened, feminised state. In effect, as Norden succinctly states, 'America *is* the disabled Vietnam veteran, and vice versa' (101). Norden supports his analysis of Born on the Fourth of July by drawing upon statements made by the director of the film Oliver Stone and the actor Tom Cruise, who played the role of Kovic. For Cruise, the film was about 'the country, what it went through, was, became. You know an invalid...It was a crippling time for this country...' (Norden 101). More importantly, for Stone the film was a means 'to show America being forced to redefine its concept of heroism' (Norden 101). This redefinition of heroism, however, involved a process in which the male protagonist reclaims his manhood by reasserting patriarchal values.

The restoration of Kovic's manhood, imagined through a romanticised fantasy where he is the hero rescuing America from its own weakness, has far-reaching implications for feminism. Norden emphasises the importance of reading Kovic's narrative in gendered terms, understanding the feminine imagery in his reading as a positive interpretation of male/female relationships that would otherwise be problematic and negative. For example, feminine imagery makes it possible to interpret America as the maternal body to which the disabled veteran finally returns 'home' (Norden 102). In this interpretation, as Norden argues, masculinist nationalist ideals in the Vietnam period are seen to have failed and the

disabled veteran is presented as a victim of patriarchy (102). However, if the disabled veteran is also to be read as the saviour of a nation, meaning that America is a 'woman in need of rescue', within this context, feminine imagery is problematic to feminism.

To begin with, figuring America as feminine and weak maintains women in a position that is inferior to men. Although this may restore masculine agency to a man who has been physically impaired by war, it does so in a manner that is damaging to women. Additionally, the trope of America as 'weakened' and 'feminised' mirrored Republican cold war ideology. As Elaine Tyler May argues, 'Those who claimed that South Vietnam fell as a result of softness against communism also blamed feminism for what they perceived as the destruction of the family' (201).<sup>19</sup> The feminine threat to both nationhood and manhood was a perception that pervaded the whole spectrum of American politics. Women who were criticising the oppressive structures of the patriarchal family were viewed as the enemy at home. Issues on the domestic front became conflated with American foreign politics. The elusive enemy abroad was perceived as the feminine 'Other' who had humiliated and emasculated America. America was losing the war in Vietnam and was in danger of damaging its macho image as a powerful global military force. America, as a nation weakened by a feminised 'Other' was an over-arching cultural, political and social concern that had to be dealt with and eradicated. If America was to regain its self-esteem as a leading nation of the world then that meant opposing feminism, which was perceived to be a threat to

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<sup>19</sup> The backlash to feminism that Tyler May describes reflects American anxieties about the nation's identity encoded as masculine and its national security. Susan Faludi in The Terror Dream (2007) describes a similar phenomenon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America. As Faludi remarks: 'In the fall and winter of 2001, the women's movement wasn't just a domestic annoyance; it was a declared domestic enemy, a fifth column in the war on terror' (22).

the American male and the American values that he upheld. Therefore, although much of Kovic's book is about his feminised state as a disabled War Veteran, the text is filled with images that reinforce masculinity, American male-culture and ultimately patriarchy.

In contrast, Vinge's utilisation of the image of the disabled war veteran takes on a different form and has an alternative outcome. As I have already discussed, Maris does not embark on a personal quest to regain his masculinity. In Vinge's text, her war veteran rejects masculinity and the male values that are associated with it. Maris is deliberately maintained in a marginal position. For instance, the women in 'Tin Soldier' do nothing to remasculinize him. In this respect, it may be argued that Vinge's spacer women are like the 'do-nothings' in Kovic's text. They are women who are tolerant of Maris, but they would never entertain a physical relationship with him because of his impaired body. Brandy is the exception. However, ultimately, her relationship with Maris results in a shared identity that is feminine and 'Other' and, as I have already argued, Vinge's feminised male cyborg is an important figure for promoting equality based upon physical difference. In this respect, Vinge's narrative refuses to restore patriarchal values. Unlike Kovic, who attempts to reconstruct a masculine identity in order to distance himself from his feminised body and achieve an idealised masculine status valued by patriarchy, 'Tin Soldier' suggests that those who are victims of patriarchal society, whether they are male or female, should reject patriarchy and join with feminists to seek out an alternative future. I would argue that Vinge's bold call for a political alliance between the sexes is driven by a concern that the backlash against feminism was imminent. Indeed, the negative response by men



to an all-female spacer culture outlined in Vinge's text resonates with events that were taking place within American society at that time.

To begin with, in the political turmoil of the 1970s, 'a backlash of exaggerated *machismo*' was expressed through cultural institutions such as the film industry. In this male-dominated field, filmmaking was a medium through which men vented their discontent with women, particularly women who posed a threat to them. Often, in such films women would be the victims of male frustration and anger and this took the form of aggressive verbal abuse or even extreme physical violence.<sup>20</sup> As actress Julie Christie once remarked, the 1970s was not a good time for women (LaGravenese and Demme, 2004). While the film industry espoused the freedom and rights of the male citizen at the expense of women, the New Right was beginning to emerge as a major force by 'opposing the Equal Rights Amendment, and condemning student radicalism, the counterculture, feminism, and the sexual revolution' (Tyler May 201). The position from which Vinge and others like her were writing was becoming increasingly marginalised. From all sides, there was a concerted effort to contain women politically, socially and culturally. Just as feminism was beginning to show confidence in its political aims by critically evaluating patriarchy and promoting alternative possibilities, patriarchy closed ranks by returning to the rhetoric of the 'traditional family' and 'cold war militance' (Tyler May 201-202).

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<sup>20</sup> In Richard LaGravenese and Ted Demme's documentary *A Decade Under the Influence* (2004), actress Julie Christie states that 'the energy' which 'defined North American independent film making of the 1970s' was an 'inimical American male energy'. Consequently, as Peter Lev affirms, films of the 1970s were 'overwhelmingly about the problems of men' (142), reflecting the male point of view and the frustration and anger they felt towards an American system they believed had betrayed and marginalised them. Scenes of men venting their frustration and anger pervaded American film at the time and often depicted women on the receiving end of male verbal abuse and violence. The most disturbing examples are Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* (1971) and Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (1972) which contain scenes of women submitted to extreme sexual violence and agonising deaths.

In light of the historical and social context in which I have discussed Vinge's text, I read her cyborg protagonists as figures of hope. The love forged between Maris and Brandy represents the author's desire for equality and a need for mutual respect between the sexes if society is to move beyond patriarchy. At the same time, Vinge's text voices fears about the survival of feminism at a moment when there was a concerted effort to contain women. For instance, when Brandy realises that her life has become redefined through technology, she at once expresses anxiety at the prospect of years of confinement: 'How will I live...on one world for centuries, always remembering' (Vinge 247). Brandy mourns the loss of her privileged life as a spacer woman and the freedom this life promised her, but she also asks Maris 'How do you bear it?' to which he replies, 'By learning what really matters... Worlds are not so small. We'll go to other worlds if you want – we could see Home... And maybe in time the rules will change' (247). It is not Brandy who offers the final words of hope. Instead, the hope for an alternative future beyond patriarchy comes from Maris, the physically impaired war veteran. Maris rejects the warring culture that has made him into who he is and embraces a future that maintains him in a marginal and 'Other' position – it is a future shared by two equal people who love and respect each other. Vinge's text suggests that in order for feminism to survive the upheavals of the 1970s and an uncertain future, it will be necessary to persuade men that they are also exploited by patriarchy. In her promotion of a utopian genderless future, Vinge looks beyond the human and utilises the cyborg as a figure for social transformation.

## **Section Three**

### **Cyborgs in Crisis: Men in Decline**

## Chapter 5

### Lois McMaster Bujold's The Warrior's Apprentice (1986)

In the previous chapter, I interpreted Vinge's 'crippled cyborgs' as figures of hope that promoted equality in a genderless future. I also argued that Vinge's cyborg text reflected an emerging backlash against feminism, through patriarchy's promotion of aggressive masculinity. Through the cyborg figure, Vinge offers a vision of how equality may be possible, as well as indicating the impact that a lack of cooperation between the sexes would have upon feminist politics. However, Vinge's text does not fully anticipate events in the following decade and how they would challenge traditional male roles and masculine identity. In this chapter, I look at the military space opera novel The Warrior's Apprentice (1986) by Lois McMaster Bujold arguing that it is a response to concerns about men and masculinity in 1980s America. Bujold's text is loaded with conflicting ideologies about what makes a man in contemporary American society and is, I argue, both a conservative and a subversive novel. The hero in The Warrior's Apprentice is a disabled nobleman called Miles who is desperate to prove his masculinity through a military career but, because of his physical impairments, it is an identity that constantly eludes him. Bujold's representation of masculinity is ambivalent. Miles pursues the masculine ideal. However, through the figure of Miles, Bujold parodies manhood.

Reflecting the disruption of America's ideal of manhood by changing global economic and political forces during the 1980s, I argue that The Warrior's Apprentice destabilises masculinity through the trope of disability. I explore how Bujold upholds patriarchal ideals of masculinity and how she subverts them

through her disabled male protagonist by offering an original interpretation of Miles as a cyborg figure as defined by Haraway in her 'Cyborg Manifesto'. Miles's relationship with technology is cyclic, with technology disabling, enabling and disabling him again, but never offering him a stable masculine identity. As a cyborg that unsettles masculinity, I argue that Miles is oppositional to the hypermasculine male cyborg that emerged in American popular culture during the 1980s, such as RoboCop, that represents the male subject as technologically enabled and invincible. Instead, I argue that Miles represents the uncertainty of Reagan's America and that Miles is himself a Reaganesque figure that conforms to and undermines the American myth of masculinity.

Furthermore, by discussing the position of the physically impaired Miles within the traditional role of the space opera hero, I consider how Bujold queers the conventional representations of masculinity in military science fiction. Finally, I reflect on Bujold's ambivalent attitude towards gender in her novel. I argue that while she is constrained by the conventions of the military science fiction genre, Bujold creatively draws on cultural anxieties about masculine identity in contemporary American culture in order to test the limitations of the genre. To begin, I will discuss the emergence of anxieties about masculinity in 1980s America, emphasising that as traditional gender roles became increasingly destabilised by a shifting global economy, America was strengthening its position as a global military power.

### **Socio-historical Context: The 1980s and American Masculinity in Decline**

As the 1970s gave way to the 1980s, American society experienced the contradictions generated by a changing global capitalist economy. A newly

elected Republican government underpinned an emerging New Right ideology that promoted traditional gender roles, emphasising the importance of masculinity as a primary identity in matters concerning the family and for defending American values. However, the New Right also adopted and implemented hard line economic policies that undercut and eroded America's masculine ideal. According to Susan Faludi, post-war America's masculine ideal came to be measured by a man's usefulness to society, demonstrated through his ability to hold down a job, provide for his family and serve as a role model for the next generation of men (Faludi, Stiffed 16-18). However, the 1980s also marked a period of de-regulation of the market place and Western de-industrialisation. In its place emerged a consumer economy that relied on a de-skilled, low paid workforce. This shift from 'heavy' to 'light' industry emasculated the traditional male workforce, giving rise to anxieties and fears about masculinity and its decline. As David Savran explains, it was in 'the 1980s, as men's real wages shrank dramatically', when men 'became increasingly anxious about gender roles' (191).

Male anxieties about masculinity and traditional gender roles were exacerbated by the New Right's promotion of conservative values of individualism and essentialism. While men were encouraged to maintain their place as breadwinner and as head of the family, women were told that equality had been won and female self-empowerment was possible. Women were actively encouraged to enter the workforce and compete with men, while expected to retain their traditional role as mother and carer of children. At the same time, in an aggressively driven media campaign, debates about the working mother became part of the backlash against feminism. According to the media, feminism's

ambition for women's economic independence was enough to diminish the male population and threaten the reproduction and welfare of future generations of American citizens. As Susan Faludi discusses in her book Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women (1992), in the 1980s the media generated myths about the damage that feminism and women's desire for equality was having on American society. From the 'man shortage' and 'infertility epidemics', to the demise in women's mental and physical health and the damaging effect of 'toxic' day care centres on children of working mothers, women, it seemed, were out of sync with their natural role as wife and home maker (Faludi, Backlash 8-9). While this backlash against gender equality eroded the small gains won by feminism, it also reflected men's perception that their male authority was challenged and undermined both in the workplace and at home. Overall, men's problems were presented as the fault of feminism and ambitious women not the consequence of capitalism and America's failing economy.

While America was immersed in an economic crisis that adversely affected the male ego and American masculinity, it was also a nation that remained a leading global military force. In particular, it was President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), popularly known as 'Star Wars', which was set to secure America's military dominance across the globe.<sup>21</sup> Through the militarization of space, Reagan's America offered its nation a science fiction image of masculine superiority through the sanctioning of male aggression and violence through war. War was the last male bastion in which the role of the soldier was unquestionably encoded as masculine. If nothing else, in war, a man could prove his masculinity

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<sup>21</sup> See David Seed's excellent discussion on the science fiction community's fascination with and active participation in America's national security strategies during the 1980s in American Science Fiction and the Cold War (1999).

through his ability to fight, over power, and kill the enemy. America's strategic involvement in numerous overseas conflicts such as the Iran-Iraq war offered this possibility to the American male. If America provided little opportunity for boys to become men on the home front, then maybe it could be achieved abroad, in a far-off and distant war zone. It is within this context of masculinity in crisis at home and the opportunity for military venture abroad that I now consider Bujold's military space opera novel The Warrior's Apprentice and its leading protagonist, Miles.

### **Bujold's Vorkosigan Series**

Bujold's Vorkosigan series is set in an imagined universe interspersed with planets that have been colonised by humans. Although these colonies are self-governing and have created their own particular and diverse cultures, they are also connected to one another by a form of space travel called wormholes. Miles Vorkosigan is born into an aristocratic family and is from birth physically deformed and afflicted with degenerative illnesses. He is easily marked out as different because of his physical appearance. His head is enlarged and his growth is stunted, an overall appearance 'exaggerated by a short neck set on a twisted spine' (Bujold, Brothers in Arms 12). Miles also suffers from a condition called 'brittle bones', which has given him a life-long 'intimacy with pain', causing him to look much older than his actual years (Bujold, The Warrior's 70). He is the inhabitant of a planet known as Barrayar. Barrayar evokes the word 'barrier' meaning an obstacle that keeps people apart or prevents communication and alludes to the status of the colony as separated and closed off from other societies.



Barrayar has for many years been lost to the colonial network, until it is rediscovered. The planet is governed by a social system that is both patriarchal and feudal, but has advanced military technology. It is a social system that closely resembles the communist regime of the U.S.S.R. Like Barrayar, the U.S.S.R was a closed society that was in the 1980s changing and fragmenting, opening up to new possibilities from an outside world. In 1985, the U.S.S.R's political leader, Mikhail Gorbachev proposed a period of 'perestroika' meaning 'restructuring' in an attempt to modernise an outmoded political and economic system (Graham 1). At the same time, Barrayar resembles the U.S.A, a leading global military force that was facing its own economic challenges in a changing and unstable world.<sup>22</sup> However, while the U.S.S.R was looking to liberalise its social system by embracing new ideas and welcoming change, the U.S.A was returning to conservative values looking back to tradition. Barrayar reflects similar views to those of the New Right and is unreconstructed in its attitude towards difference possessing a culture that is repressive and intolerant towards individuals who deviate from the 'norm'. Those affected by such attitudes include women and the physically impaired, thus aligning the two. The Vorkosigan Sagas follow the adventures of Miles and the everyday prejudices and obstacles he has to face, as he pursues his desire for acceptance in a future patriarchal world where his physical impairment marks him out as a mutant. It is at this point that I will now establish Miles as a cyborg figure, as defined by Haraway in her 'Cyborg Manifesto', arguing that Miles is oppositional to images of the cyborg that emerged in mainstream culture during the 1980s.

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<sup>22</sup> In the 1980s, America was adjusting to the effects of a liberalised market economy. Like the rest of the world, America became increasingly vulnerable to the unstable market forces of global capitalism.

## **The Cyborg: Technology Disabling Masculinity**

Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' emerged in 1985 at a moment when North America's relationship with technology was extremely ambivalent and its economic and military ventures unstable. In her manifesto, Haraway argues that she wants to build 'an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism' stating, 'At the centre of my ironic faith, my blasphemy, is the cyborg' (149). In patriarchal culture, the cyborg is a sacred figure representing Man's desire for salvation. Haraway's blasphemy is centred on demonstrating that the cyborg is a trope and material entity that can also turn against patriarchy. To begin with, Haraway confronts the fact that the cyborg is a figure associated with war and violence, stating, 'modern war is a cyborg orgy, coded by C3I, command-control-communication-intelligence, an \$84 billion item in 1984's US defence budget' (150). The cyborg is a figure that represents American Imperialism and the patriarchal desire to ensure the survival of the American male subject, if necessary, by force. At the same time, the cyborg is a figure that emerges in American patriarchal culture when men and masculinity are most threatened signalling fears about their decline. Haraway considers that although the cyborg serves the interests of patriarchy, it is also a figure that has the potential to subvert patriarchal intentions. After all, as she argues, cyborgs are 'exceedingly unfaithful to their origins' (151). Haraway recognises the unsettling effect of patriarchal technology on American society. The cyborg figure, an amalgamation of human and machine, epitomises American fears of losing control over the technology it has created to defend and protect its interests. The cyborg is a metaphor representing America's ambivalent relationship with technology. In her 'Cyborg

Manifesto', Haraway considers the destabilising effect of the cyborg in American culture and how this can serve the interests of feminism.

Similarly, Bujold's text represents the destabilisation of gender relations during the 1980s. In 1986, the year that Bujold's novel was published, the space shuttle Challenger exploded killing all on board. The space shuttle programme was a symbol of America's technological superiority and in this particular case, marked a moment when America was emerging from a deep and difficult economic recession. The Challenger tragedy undermined America's self-image of masculine invincibility and its rhetoric of economic recovery and regeneration. In this context, I argue that Miles is a cyborg, as defined by Haraway, he is a product of a militaristic society and a technology that both endorses and subverts patriarchal culture. Miles's relationship with technology is cyclic, disabling, enabling and disabling again, creating new challenges for him to face and overcome, but never offering him a stable masculine identity. Throughout the Vorkosigan series, Miles is alternately adapted and altered by technology. The effects of this intervention are not always empowering. In The Warrior's Apprentice, Miles explains to a fellow trainee soldier how more sophisticated technology may change his life in the future: 'Leg brace...Keeps me from breaking them, until the surgeon's quite sure I'm done growing. Then I get them replaced with synthetics' ( 6). Here, Bujold evokes science fiction's classic image of the cyborg, offering the reader a techno-fantasy of a future Miles as an invincible male subject that is enhanced by prosthetics, enabling him to surpass any physical demands.

In a subsequent novel, some of Miles's problems are remedied. However, his unusual appearance remains unaltered. In Bujold's fourth novel, Brothers in

Arms (1989), Miles's 'brittle' bones are gradually replaced with 'synthetics' (Levy 14), leading him to wonder 'how much of his body is truly himself, whether prosthetics make him less real' (Bemis 20). However, no sooner is one physical impairment 'cured', when Miles, in Mirror Dance (1994), develops another disability in the form of epilepsy, which is the result of being killed, cryogenically frozen, revived and repaired (Levy 14). Bujold's portrayal of a physically impaired protagonist makes Miles unique in science fiction. Often, in science fiction, the disabled body is presented as either a divine figure or an embodiment of evil. It is rare that a disabled male protagonist is central to the narrative and even less so, is there a male protagonist who is overtly presented through a body that is visibly deformed, bearing impairments that frustrate and limit them. As Anne L. Haehl points out '...SF writers have seldom dealt with the real effects of the crippling on daily life' and when they do, the impaired are miraculously cured by technology (1). In relation to Miles, this is certainly not the case.

Disability scholars have rejected the cyborg as a figure representing the disabled subject. For example, David Serlin is adamant that the cyborg should not be associated with disability because it is a figure that undermines the material and social reality of those living with disability, claiming, 'cyborgs in late twentieth and early twenty-first century culture, [...] hardly begin to understand the complex historical and technological origins of the body-machine interface for amputees and other prosthesis wearers. They also fail to give agency to the people who use prosthetic technology every day without glamour or fanfare' (Serlin, 'The Other Arms Race' 51). Similarly, as I discussed in the Introductory Chapter, Tobin Sieber's asserts that the cyborg, as defined by Haraway, is not disabled, but is a

figure representing the post-human subject enabled by technology (Siebers 178). However, Haraway suggests that the cyborg is an important figure for explaining how patriarchal society destabilises and subverts its own desire for total authority and control over the feminine 'Other'. In this thesis I argue that the cyborg in women's writing emerges at moments of social and political upheaval and change, questioning gender hierarchies in patriarchal culture. In particular, the cyborg, as a disabled subject reconstructed through technology, provides critical insight into western philosophical concepts of the human, encoded as male and masculine. Significantly, the presence of disability in the texts that I discuss unsettles naturalised concepts of the gendered body. In opposition to Serlin's and Siebers's protests, I consider that the cyborg emphasises both the utopian possibilities and the everyday problems of living with physical difference such as those experienced by women and the disabled subject.

Bujold has stated that the choice of a physically impaired male protagonist was in part, a useful literary device for generating a wide variety of scenarios and narratives for her space opera series: 'I came by my interest in disability as a theme...for generating plots for character centred stories...The rule is, figure out what is the worst possible thing you can do to this guy – and then do it.' (Levy 9). As she goes on to explain, the 'worst possible thing' was to create a 'physically handicapped' character and place him 'in a highly patriarchal and militaristic planetary culture with deep, historically-founded prejudices against anything perceived as a "mutation"' (Levy 9). Bujold creates an emasculated male who has all the odds stacked against him and is forced to face and challenge prejudice on a daily basis. For Miles, every day is fraught with personal battles as he tries to forge an identity that affords him respect from those around him. As a disabled

man, this is an extremely difficult task in an environment where he is unable to take his social position as nobleman for granted. At the same time, the relationship between Miles's disabled body and his masculine identity reflects a moment in history, when the patriarchal desire for men to dominate and take control of the feminine 'Other' was undercut by an economic system that destabilised masculinity.

Andrew Ross has argued that it was during the 1980s that the crisis in masculinity found expression in both mainstream and science fiction culture. Ross claims that in mainstream film, images promoting the 'newly fortified contours of masculinity' were represented through 'the inflated physiques of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone' (152). As he goes on to argue, such figures reflected 'the redundancy of working muscle in a postindustrial age' and the 'technological regime of cyborg masculinity...' (152). For example, in Paul Verhoeven's film RoboCop (1983), police officer Alex J. Murphy is brutally murdered by a criminal gang and his remains used to construct the hypermasculine figure of RoboCop. Murphy's body is destroyed and recreated by military technology and, as an invincible cyborg, he is more powerful than ever before.

Similarly, former body builder turned actor Arnold Schwarzenegger plays a cyborg called the T800 in James Cameron's film The Terminator (1984). The T800 is a cyborg soldier sent back from the future to prevent the birth of a resistance leader who will fight the machines in a future world – a future world where humanity is almost eradicated by the technology it has made. Schwarzenegger's cyborg is a machine that passes as a human who is a menacing and violent, muscle bound male. The cyborg's exaggerated physique connotes technological might through a spectacular display of engineered muscular power

that threatens to dominate and control the lives of men. At the same time, hypermasculine militarised cyborg figures, such as Officer Murphy in RoboCop and Schwarzenegger's over inflated body in Terminator serve to mask patriarchal fears about the decline of the American male, these fears found expression in the counterculture literature of cyberpunk.

American cyberpunk literature emerged in the 1980s as a genre that presented a dystopian vision of a near future governed by multi-national companies vying for global financial dominance. In the pursuit of total power, companies use console cowboys, who, in general, are men that merge with technology by projecting their consciousness into a global computer network in order to infiltrate, compromise and sabotage global financial security systems. In effect, console cowboys are like mercenaries, they are hired to work on covert operations for powerful companies. While projected into cyberspace, they are vulnerable and can even die. In these novels, the relationship between men and technology is presented through a male body compromised by a need for 'prosthetic help' (Ross 153). As Ross argues, this 'suggested a growing sense of the impotence of straight white males in the countercultures' (153). For example in the futuristic *noir* novels of William Gibson, the unlimited possibilities of technology fuelled a male fantasy of empowerment. While technology fragmented the coherence of bodily experience, offering nightmare images of an altered and castrated body (Ross 153), technology also released the male protagonist from his physical limitations, offering transcendence and immortality. In Neuromancer (1984), the male protagonist Case is economically and physically disenfranchised when he steals valuable data from his employers. In revenge, they take away his ability to work by damaging his nervous system with 'a wartime

Russian mycotoxin' (12). Socially and physically impaired, Case is feminised by a ruthless capitalist system. As the narrator explains, 'For Case, who lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall...The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh' (12). Nonetheless, technology redeems Case, when his consciousness is immortalised in cyberspace (317). Merged with technology, Case transcends the limitations of his body.

In Bujold's Vorkosigan Saga, technology does not allow her protagonist to achieve a hyper-masculine body nor does it allow him transcendence. Instead, technology impairs Miles and he has to learn to live with a body that limits him. From the beginning, Miles is not enhanced by 'a technological regime of cyborg masculinity' but is 'Othered' by technology. In Bujold's second novel Barrayar (1991), the foetal Miles is impaired, when his mother is wounded in an assassination attempt that was meant to kill his father. A biochemical weapon threatens both Miles and his mother's life, but it is the antidote to the poisonous gas that damages Miles's vulnerable foetal body: 'It's a violent teratogen. Destroys bone development in the growing fetus' (381). In Bujold's text, Miles's emasculated and disabled status is not an essential part of him, but is the consequence of external forces. The medical technology that saves Miles's life arrests his future potential for acquiring a masculine status that would 'normally' allow him to construct a socially accepted manhood.

Miles's life is saved when he is separated from his mother's body and is transferred into an artificial womb, called a 'uterine replicator' and medical intervention is used to halt the damaging effect of the antidote (Bujold, Barrayar 389, 406). Miles in effect is born of two mothers, a biological mother and a cybernetic mother. His origins are constituted of both flesh and machine, which, I



would argue, create for Miles a cyborg identity. Miles's unusual beginnings transcend the human reproductive cycle. No longer can it be said that he is born out of the sexual union between a woman and a man, but instead, he is the product of technology. Miles exemplifies Haraway's definition of the cyborg in science fiction, 'Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs – creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted' (149). Miles, like the cyborg, is a de-naturalised figure, whose human male identity has become disrupted by technology. Miles may be a male subject but his status as human is slippery due to his cyborg identity.

Haraway argues that categories that construct the human male body are dependent 'on the plot of original unity out of which difference must be produced' (151). Miles, on the contrary, is a male subject who is the embodiment of difference. Miles's physical impairments and disturbing appearance are the consequence of technological intervention and never achieves 'normality'. At best, he is described as a 'mutation' (Bujold, Barrayar 402). Unlike the seamless merging of organic and machine, as exemplified by the Terminator cyborg, naturalising the alignment of masculinity with technology, and signifying male power, the merging of Miles's body with technology is far less glamorous. For example, he is assisted by a 'much loathed' prosthetic in the form of a heavy brace, which enables him to engage in physical activities, often saving his brittle bones from breaking (Bujold, The Warrior's 9). Bujold neither hides nor conceals Miles's deformed body, but rather, her text explores the politics of Miles's physical appearance. Miles's identity is that of a disabled male subject who is denigrated as a mutant subverting his privileged status as a nobleman. Miles's cyborg identity serves as a metaphor for the disempowered and

emasculated male of the 1980s, as well as representing the lived reality of the disabled male body.

### **In Pursuit of the Masculine Ideal**

Although disabled, Miles pursues the masculine ideal that his culture demands of him. In The Warrior's Apprentice, Miles Vorkosigan is a seventeen-year-old nobleman who is forced to come to terms with his physical impairments. Miles desires to follow in his father's and grandfather's footsteps and become a great military leader (20). However, he fails the demanding physical tests required to pursue a military career. Subsequently, he is left wondering what future there is for a man who is impaired, unemployed, and unlikely to find a woman willing to marry him:

Only seventeen, too young to marry even by  
Barrayaran standards and quite unemployed...  
And Elena herself...What was in it for her?  
What pleasure, to be climbed all over by an  
ugly, twisted shrimp – to be stared at in public,  
in a world where native custom and imported  
medicine combined ruthlessly to eliminate even  
the mildest physical deformity. (28)

Miles, however, is from an elite family that has chosen, against customary superstitions and values, to allow Miles the chance of a life regardless of his deformities. Miles is exasperated by his inability to approximate Barrayar's

masculine ideal and proclaims 'No hero he'. Depressed, he concedes, 'Grandfather's right, we are a reduced generation' (26, 27). Here, Miles is referring to his grandfather's lament about a changing social system and the loss of male power that the nobility once enjoyed. His grandfather blames this on the exposure of Barrayar to external, foreign cultures that promote individual merit over any particular privileged identity. To his grandfather, Miles's disability represents all that is wrong with Barrayar. He is the product of his own son's relationship with a woman from an outside world that opposes the male dominated regime of Barrayar. Miles is feminised, an embodiment of a diluted and diminished Barrayaran masculinity.

Miles's mother is painfully aware of the difficulties that her son faces and to distract him from his recent failure in securing a place at the military academy she encourages him to visit a relative on her home colony of Beta. It is during this 'vacation' that Miles becomes embroiled in a series of events, whereby he charts a ship, delivers contraband into a war zone and raises an army of mercenaries. Through this adventure, Miles proves that he has the potential to be a great military leader, worthy of the Vorkosigan title and able to win his father's approval. However, this can only be achieved in a social system that exists outside of Barrayar. As I have already discussed, Barrayar suggests 'barrier' meaning an obstacle that keeps people apart or prevents communication. The word 'barrier' also refers to an obstacle in a system that prevents progress or success. The social system on Barrayar is an obstacle that hinders Miles in his quest for manhood and warrior status. When Miles arrives at Beta Colony, he is presented with an opportunity to relinquish himself of his home planet's social constraints. Beta, as the name implies, is a 'better' place that enables Miles to

pursue his military career and ‘better’ himself. Miles cannot become the man he desires to be at home, but in a different environment in a far-off distant galaxy, it is presented as a possibility. It is at this point that I will now read Mile’s hybrid identity of aristocratic nobleman and physically disabled subject as an ideological expression of an individual’s desire to recover their masculinity – a desire representative of Reagan’s America and the crisis of masculinity, which emerged during that era.

### **Reagan and the Working-Class Man**

During the 1980s, Reagan and the New Right launched a campaign that promised to recover not only America’s masculine identity as a nation, but also the masculine identity of the working-class male. Michael Kimmel writes: ‘Ronald Reagan’s presidency heralded “morning in America.” Perhaps now American men would awaken to a new recharged manhood for a new, ambitious, and aggressive era’ (291). It was through the Hollywood image of Ronald Reagan that the New Right re-branded the American ideal of manhood. As Katrine Kielos argues in her article ‘This Bud’s for You’ (2008), ‘Ronald Reagan, like John F. Kennedy, played consciously on the prevailing Hollywood ideal of masculinity’ (1). Ronald Reagan promoted himself as ‘the independent hero. The solitary hero, intrepidly resisting authority’ (Keilos 1). Authority was the public sector that had become ‘over-large and over-protective’, feminizing the American nation (Keilos 1).

Adopting a macho image, Reagan called to the American nation to join him in the ‘economic war in which everyone was needed to defend the USA against Japan once more’ (Keilos 1). Through this rhetoric of war, Reagan gave

America's 'silent majority', the white working-class male, reasons to feel useful again. As 'one of the boys', Reagan would lead his army of working men into a better future, but it would take guts and a fighting spirit to win such an outcome. As Savran explains, 'during the 1980s, the 'white male body,' as Jeffords notes, 'became increasingly a vehicle of display – of musculature, of beauty, of physical feats, and of a gritty toughness' (200). Nonetheless, the reality was very different. America was failing in a changing global economy and traditional male jobs were rapidly disappearing (Keilos 1). But, rather than admitting a systemic failure, the onus was placed on the individual to achieve and succeed. Those who failed were pathologised, and this pathology was projected onto the individual and their body.

In her book Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity In The Reagan Era (1994), Susan Jefford's argues that those who did not fit into the American masculine ideal were cast as 'soft bodies' and ranged from 'welfare recipients to homosexuals' (38). The 'soft body' was the 'Other' to Reagan's self-promoted image of a man 'chopping wood at his ranch, riding horses, standing tall at the presidential podium'. Reagan's body was a 'hard body', that managed to look 'fit and even young' and was 'a body not subject to disease, fatigue or aging' (Jeffords 25). Reagan even gave credibility to his 'hard body' image by surviving an assassination attempt that was made on his life in the early days of his presidency. Despite Reagan's self-image, his body remained a focus for concern, from anxieties about his age to 'the appearance of cancerous spots on his nose' (Jeffords 24). Reagan projected an image of invincible manhood in a bid to win over the working-class male and his vote, but he also possessed a body that was visibly in decline. Reagan's relationship with masculinity and masculine identity was

extremely ambiguous, with the reality of his aging body contradicting his macho president image.

The destabilisation of masculinity by the diminished body of an elite male figure is a key theme in Bujold's The Warrior's Apprentice. Similar to Reagan, Miles also survives an assassination attempt. Unlike Reagan, Miles is left with visible and severe life-long health problems. However, it is Miles's encounter with desperate, down-at-heel men, whom he rescues, which affords him his leadership and own military success. Like Reagan, Miles is effective in his performance as a leader of men, but, at the same time, the reader is constantly reminded of his unmanly physical appearance. Despite his achievements, Miles is given diminutive nicknames, such as 'shorty', 'kid' and 'mutant' that call his masculine status into question (Bujold, The Warrior's 186, 70, 237). His unstable masculine identity together with his ability to court the emasculated working-class male leads me to read Miles Vorkosigan as an archetypal 'Reaganesque' figure.

### **Miles the Archetypal 'Reaganesque' figure**

Bujold's image of Miles as a man with an enlarged head and diminished body is a significant science fiction trope reminiscent of the mutant supermen popular in the science fiction pulp literature of the 1930s and 1940s. As I discussed in Chapter One, it was during the pre-war decades that the mutant superman became an ambiguous male fantasy about the evolutionary development of the human race and technology. The diminished or mutant body expressed male anxieties about masculine identity, both in terms of mental and physical prowess. At the same time the mutant superman emphasised the desire to depart from or transcend the body, thus marking the body as limited, feminine, even

redundant, serving to promote male superiority in terms of intelligence and ability (Attebery 64). Similarly, Miles's locus of strength and power is his brain, which is emphasised by an enlarged head. Miles is an intelligent person and excellent rhetorician. As Haehl has argued, Miles is skilled in language and is able to persuade others to join him and follow him not by 'overcoming people's bodies' but by changing 'their minds' (1).

However, Miles's physical appearance of enlarged head and diminished body is also an ideological expression of the importance of mind over body, representing an individual's desire to overcome societal constraints and obstacles, through sheer will power. Within the terms of the hard body/soft body dichotomy of the 1980s, Miles promises to surpass the pathology of his impaired body that would categorise him as a 'soft body', through a desire to succeed and exceed his limitations. Virginia T. Bemis has described Miles as a 'supercrip' who is 'able to meet any challenge, and destined to serve as an example for others' (21). Miles embarks upon a personal journey to reinstate his usefulness to society and recover a masculine identity which he considers his title as nobleman is sadly lacking. Miles helps other men to do the same. In fact, the catalyst to Miles's adventures as a successful mercenary captain begins through helping a fellow man down on his luck. At the same time, Miles's pursuit of military success through economic gain reflects the money culture of the 1980s. Work, like war, is an aggressive and competitive environment and the hard macho bodies of American men are an important image for promoting success in the fight for America's economic recovery. However, in Bujold's text, 'hard' men are in desperate need of rescue.

## **Miles Rescuing Men**

When Miles arrives on the Betan colony, he is immediately intrigued by the antics of a rogue pilot officer. The officer in question is a man called Arde Mayhew, whose ship is being de-commissioned because it is now obsolete and, as a result, Mayhew's role as a pilot officer is no longer required. As the name suggests, Arde is the 'hard body' to Miles's 'soft body'. While Miles uses language to help him overcome obstacles, Arde resorts to other forms of persuasion, such as violence. The threat of redundancy has forced Mayhew to take desperate action by arming himself with weapons and explosives and refusing to leave the ship or talk to his superiors (Bujold, The Warrior's 65-69):

So Miles eavesdropped, shamelessly fascinated.  
The man they were discussing was a fellow-freak,  
it seemed, a loser in trouble. A wormhole jump  
pilot with an obsolete coupler system running  
through his brain, soon to be technologically  
unemployed, holed up in his old ship, fending  
off the wrecking crews – how? Miles  
wondered. (69)

Like Miles, Mayhew is a cyborg, ('a fellow-freak'), whose technology ('an obsolete coupler system running through his brain') disables and disempowers him. Intrigued and impressed by Mayhew's no nonsense tactics, Miles offers to help. At the same time, he imagines Mayhew as a man heroically battling against the odds:



Miles pictured the man, huddled in his dim  
recess, stripped of allies, like the last survivor  
of a hopeless siege. His hand clenched  
unconsciously. His ancestor General Count  
Selig Vorkosigan, had raised the famous  
siege of Vorkosigan Surleau with no more  
than a handful of picked retainers and  
subterfuge. (70)

Inspired by this allusion to his family's military history, Miles transforms Mayhew into a hero. At the same time, through 'a simple change of mannerisms', Miles transforms himself into a figure of authority: 'He summoned ten generations of warriors to his back, and produced the most austere smile' (70). Miles persuades the authorities that he has influence over Mayhew and is given permission to speak with him. However, when Miles is face to face with Mayhew, what he encounters is indeed a 'desperate man' of about forty, drunk, tearful and in need of a radical solution to his problem (74-77). Miles sums up this pitiful situation as a system failing the individual, not the individual failing the system: 'That's the trouble with the Betan system...Nobody takes personal responsibility for anyone. It's all those faceless fictional corporate entities – government by ghosts' (77). Here, it is the liberal system of Beta Colony that is being criticised by Miles, a capitalist system where women and hermaphrodites share equal status with men and a system that produces white male victims, such as Mayhew.

Beta Colony, in this context, represents an American society that has blamed women for the demise of men. In Taking It Like A Man (1998), David Savran discusses the consequences of a failing economic system on the American working-class male: 'During the 1980s, as men's real wages shrank dramatically, they became increasingly anxious about gender roles. Many became enraged at what they perceived - incorrectly – to be women's sensational economic and social success' (191). As Savran argues, the male perception of women's increased power at the expense of men is grossly distorted. The presence of disenfranchised men in Bujold's text is central to her narrative. Miles is a man who pursues an elusive masculinity and, as his name suggests, he is 'miles' away from ever achieving such an identity. Haehl has argued that, as a disabled subject, Miles's achievements have 'species and even galaxy-wide significance' (1). However, in The Warrior's Apprentice, Miles is also a champion for the 'species' of disenfranchised men, who are victims of rapid technological change and a relentless, shifting economic and political system. In fact, most of Miles's mercenaries are a collection of men who have become angry, frightened, desperate and marginalised by a laissez-faire system that has rendered them redundant if not obsolete.

Miles, like Reagan, offers solutions to an aggressive and competitive system by drawing upon ideal images of male heroes. In the case of Miles it is the image of a sword-wielding nobleman – a no-nonsense man, who governs benevolently, using his power to help other men less fortunate than himself. As Miles says to Mayhew, 'What you need is a liege lord, to take sword in hand and slice through all the red tape. Just like Vorthalia the Bold and the Thicket of Thorns' (Bujold, The Warrior's 77). Vorthalia is Miles's ego-ideal, whom he

wishes to emulate through his own display of benevolent actions. Just as Reagan drew upon male characters from Hollywood film, such as ‘The Gipper’,<sup>23</sup> Miles draws upon a male fantasy figure for inspiration. Miles, in his own mind, becomes Vorthalia, albeit in a much less dramatic manner, and rises to the occasion by using his status as nobleman to help Mayhew: “I” said Miles grandly, “am going to buy this ship. And then I shall hire *you* to pilot it” (78).

Miles’s empathy for down at heel men represents not only his own feelings of powerlessness in a body that is impaired, but also reflects the wider cultural climate of North America at the time. Mayhew is confused about why he is no longer employable. At the same time, he is not that interested in the answer. He only wishes that his way of life be maintained at all costs. Miles, the privileged and omnipotent nobleman grants Mayhew his wish by circumventing the realities of a changing contemporary capitalist society. Miles promises to help a man less fortunate than himself with money he does not possess. Similarly, Reagan, an elite and powerful politician, offered the working white male a way out of a rapidly changing economic climate with promises that were financially unviable. However, in Bujold’s fictional universe, Miles, in the final instance, is able to deliver his promise. Miles acquires a pilot and a ship, raises an army of mercenaries and embarks on a mission to help out a foreign government under siege by smuggling weaponry. In the process, Miles intercepts payrolls and hijacks ships amassing vast quantities of money and military hardware (Bujold, The Warrior’s 300-301). Not only does Miles help men recover their manhood,

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<sup>23</sup> ‘The Gipper’ was an American athlete immortalised by Reagan in the film Knute Rockne: All American (Lloyd Bacon, 1940).

he also miraculously engineers a system of economic recovery that benefits everyone.

Throughout the novel, Miles, like Reagan, elides the complicated world in which he and other men live by nostalgically evoking a mythical past, when masculinity seemed a straightforward and unproblematic identity that unquestionably belonged to men. Like Reagan, Miles uses the power of rhetoric and persuasion by offering simple and radical solutions to the ‘men’s problem’. This desire to recover America’s manhood through the recollection of myths is explored in Robert Bly’s Iron John (1998). Bly wrote Iron John as a response to the continued presence of cultural images of manhood and masculinity that he considered were irrelevant and damaging to men. In his book, Bly proposes a ‘third mode’ of manhood that is in touch with its feminine side but that is also in touch with its essential masculine self, which Bly calls ‘the deep male’ (4, 6). Iron John sifts through a range of traditional mythologies, fairy tales and legends in search of a manhood that, as observed by Savran, would rediscover ‘the Wild Man’ within, creating a gentle but virile masculinity (195).

Katrine Keilos has argued that: ‘The psychological function of myths is to help people deal with contradictions within culture’ (1). The contradiction at the heart of American manhood was that men were expected to be strong and robust in an environment that also expected them to be sensitive and understanding. In this context, Bly considers that in a changing cultural climate men are confused about what is expected of them and do not know how to be men any more. His work sets out to resolve such contradictions by reconciling men’s relationship with nature and civilization, while making a concerted effort to recover, and preserve the male psyche. For example, the fairy tale of ‘Iron John’ is about a boy who is

challenged to retrieve his ball from the cage of an imprisoned Wild Man called Iron John. The outcome of the story is dependent on whether the boy is courageous enough to take the risk and open the cage and come face-to-face with the Wild Man. The story implies that the retrieval of a masculine identity can only be found by the male subject if he is courageous enough to look deep within himself. For example, Bly asserts that 'Welcoming the Hairy Man *is* scary and risky, and it requires a different sort of courage. Contact with Iron John requires a willingness to descend into the male psyche and accept what's dark down there, including the *nourishing* dark' (6).

Taking the risk of freeing the Wild Man from within in order to enable men to endure the rigours of contemporary life is central to Bly's work. As Bly explains, 'Wild Man energy [...] leads to forceful action undertaken, not with cruelty, but with resolve' (8). Although intriguing, this narrative, like many contained in Bly's text on manhood, ultimately serves to guard male virility from external, threatening feminizing forces. The male retrieval of masculinity does not include the world of women but is centered on the reconnection and strengthening of homosocial relations. Overall, it is men who help other men discover their manhood. Iron John is a reaction to the feminisation of daily life and the emasculation of men, where the blame ultimately lies with women and the feminine 'Other', which Bly maintains on the margins of society at all costs (Savran 195-197).

### **Male Victimhood**

Miles exists within a generation of emasculated men, reflecting contemporary concerns about men and masculinity in American society. In

Michael Kimmel's Manhood in America (1996), he argues that in the 1980s, there was a desire 'to revive the traditional version of Self-Made Manhood' (300). 'These traditionalists', Kimmel states, ' – the "angry white males" of recent headlines – feel besieged by frenzied "feminazis" and a culture of entitlements, affirmative action, and special interest' (300). Consequently, male commentators produced a 'flurry of reversals' that argue that it is not women who are the victims of society, but men who bore the brunt of discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, and domestic violence on the home front (Kimmel 300-301). According to the rhetoric, it is women who are powerful and dominating, emasculating men socially, physically and sexually.

Miles's sexual exploits present him as a vulnerable male victim. For instance, Miles remembers an encounter with a young 'kinky/curious' Betan girl, who was 'fascinated with the peculiarities of his body' (Bujold, The Warrior's 66). In the liberal environment of Beta Colony, 'sexual intimacy' held 'unlimited possibilities' for a fifteen-year old Miles (66). However, Miles's relationship with the young Betan girl is neither mutual nor equal. 'In the end,' Miles is 'more self-conscious than the most open revulsion he experienced on Barrayar, with its fierce prejudice against deformity' (66). Miles's physical difference is merely a fetish for a young woman's sexual fantasy, one that he is unable to fulfil: 'Anyway, after finding his sexual parts disappointingly normal, the girl had drifted off' (66-67).

Unlike the cyborg lovers I have discussed in Chapter Four, Miles's physical deviation from the human 'norm' does not offer a desirable alternative to patriarchy's macho male. For example, in Vinge's 'Tin Soldier', Brandy desires the cyborg Maris despite his physical difference. Her desire for him questions dominant values that marginalise people because of their deviation from the

‘norm’. ‘Tin Soldier’ explores how men are oppressed by patriarchal culture through war and violence and suggests that men need to recognise this oppression in order to join women and create a genderless, post-patriarchal future. Bujold adjusts this feminist representation of the cyborg of the 1970s to reflect the cultural climate of the 1980s. Vinge uses the cyborg to highlight how patriarchal society damages men in order to transform society, while Bujold’s cyborg demonstrates that men relentlessly pursue the masculine ideal, despite the damage it inflicts upon them. For instance, as a consequence of Miles’s failed love affair, he attempts suicide and only survives because his bodyguard, Bothari, intervenes: ‘The affair had ended, for Miles, in a terrifying black depression that had deepened for weeks, culminating at last late one night in the third, and most secret, time the Sergeant had saved his life’ (Bujold, The Warrior’s 67). As this quote implies, it is not the first time that Miles has attempted to end his life, emphasising the damage that he repeatedly inflicts on himself due to his own personal crisis in masculinity. However, the intervention takes the form of a struggle which is described as follows:

He had cut Bothari twice, in their silent  
struggle for the knife, exerting hysterical  
strength against the Sergeant’s frightened  
caution of breaking his bones. The tall  
man had finally achieved a grip that held  
him, until he broke down at last, weeping  
his self-hatred into the Sergeant’s bloodied  
breast until exhaustion finally stilled him....

Bothari treated his wounds and never  
referred to the incident again. (67)

This excerpt is a bloody, violent encounter between two men but it also carries an erotic subtext, reading more like a power struggle between a man and a woman. It is a struggle that evokes David Savran's analysis of American white male victimhood, where men, who feel marginalised by society, masochistically take on the feminine position of victim. As Savran states: 'modern white masculinities are deeply contradictory, eroticizing submission and victimization while trying to retain a certain aggressive virile edge' (9). In his struggle with Botharis, Miles's attempt to retain a 'virile edge' is presented as pathetic. Bothari's duty is to protect Miles. He compensates for his liege lord's fragility by allowing Miles to injure him. Finally overpowered, Miles's humiliation is complete. Sexually undesirable and physically weak, Miles is a victim of patriarchal culture unable to prove his manhood.

For Miles, both Barrayar and Beta Colony present problems in his pursuit of a masculine identity. On Barrayar, where men have traditionally relied on the suppression of women to affirm their masculine status, Miles symbolises a degenerate generation, possessing a body that pathologises him as an individual. On Beta Colony, Miles symbolises the collective experience of victimhood by men forced to exist within an environment that increasingly threatens the status of men and their masculine identity. Miles possesses a readable body that changes depending on the location he occupies. In both situations, Miles is feminised, but in different ways. In the first instance, Miles evokes the soft body ideology of the New Right, where men are blamed for their own inadequacies. In such a male-



dominated and ableist society, as Bujold has claimed, for a man with a physically debilitating condition and a deformed body, it 'is the worst possible' scenario for a man to find himself in (Levy 9). If only Miles could overcome his physical limitations in order to become the man that his patriarchal militaristic society demands. In Barrayaran society, Miles's inability to approximate the masculine ideal is presented as a personal problem and isolates him from other men. However, on Beta Colony, Miles's emasculated identity is a social issue. No longer is Miles isolated, his failed masculinity a problem that is peculiar to him only, but instead, he is part of a social and cultural trend that is the consequence of external forces.

### **Masculinity: An Identity Impossible to Achieve**

According to this reading, The Warrior's Apprentice is an extremely conservative novel, with Miles evoking the traditionalist revivalism of America's 'Self-Made Manhood' (Kimmel 300), which emerged during the 1980s. However, Miles's pursuit of a masculine identity also de-essentialises masculinity, because Bujold's text emphasises how historical change and cultural forces simultaneously forge and dismantle the masculine ideal. As I have pointed out, neither Barrayar nor Beta offer satisfactory solutions to Miles's experience of gender oppression. In fact, both cultures are governed by ideologies that promote individual success through aggressive competition and military endeavour. Having said this, masculinity is not presented as an inherent character of the men in Bujold's novel. Instead, it is through accidents and unstable economic and political systems that the coherence of masculine identity is disturbed. Therefore,

masculinity is not an identity that is natural to men. Rather, masculinity is an identity to be performed, worked at and achieved.

As I discussed in the Introductory Chapter, Judith Butler's theory on gender performance argues that gender is not so much what one is but, rather, it is what one does. Gender is not an essential element of an individual's identity. Instead, gender is learnt through the repetition of acts that are perceived by the dominant culture to construe a particular coherent gender identity. However, as Butler states: 'The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities, [...] in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender' (Butler 12). What Butler means is that gender is an artificial construct that elides the instability of identity in western culture. According to Butler, gender identity is always open to intentional and unintentional subversions and alternate possibilities. For example, Miles is constantly studying the mannerisms of those around him. He pays close attention to men who evoke masculine authority and is especially interested in the 'tricks of body language' and the use of the voice. Also, when Miles is preparing for his physical examination for the military, he studies the non-commissioned officer who has been designated to brief them:

The non-com proctoring the tests merely  
seemed like one-man in the crowd. Miles  
measured him, wondering what conscious  
or unconscious tricks of body language  
he used to achieve that air of icy competence.  
Something to be learned there... "You will

run in pairs,” the non-com instructed. He  
did not seem to raise his voice, but somehow  
it was pitched to carry to the end of the line.  
Another effective trick,...that habit of his  
father’s of dropping his voice to a whisper  
when speaking in a rage. It locked attention.  
(Bujold, The Warrior’s 3-4)

In Bujold’s text, Miles’s disabled body disrupts the constructed naturalness of gender identity. As a consequence, Miles is presented as a man conscious of the various performances that are deemed appropriate to patriarchal conventions and will offer a convincing illusion of masculinity. Miles observes and learns from those around him, particularly from men who are in a position of authority. Therefore, Miles looks upon masculinity as a tool, rather than an inherent quality of an individual. However, Miles also understands that masculinity is an identity that commands and persuades, empowering the user. Nonetheless, when Miles adopts such ‘tricks’, his impaired body undercuts the masculine image that they are meant to evoke, undermining his performance. For instance, at a vital moment when Miles needs to command attention from his crewmembers, he does so by dramatically throwing a dagger onto the table. Miles retrieves the dagger by jumping on to the table and then begins to stride up and down along the tabletop. The dagger is a phallic object signaling a moment when Miles, a feminised male figure, acquires a position of authority over other men. Miles gets his crew’s attention, but rather than maintaining this through an authoritative trick of the voice, he does so through ‘an annoying click’, which his leg brace has developed:

‘...now it was loud in the silence. Locking attention, like a whisper. A click...whatever worked was fine by him’ (Bujold, The Warrior’s 279). Initially, Miles commands his crew’s attention through a dramatic gesture with a dagger. In opposition to this symbol that represents masculine power, the leg brace is symbolic of Miles’s feminine, weak and impaired body. Nonetheless, the ‘annoying’ audible presence of the leg brace grants him the authority that he desires.

In this scene, not only are the conventions of masculinity put into question but also able-bodied discourses that promote the impaired body as unproductive, weak, and unable to command authority. Here, power is not a consequence of physical perfection represented in the form of the human male complete with phallus, but as Miles’s intermittent use of the dagger suggests, phallic power is a male fantasy that is dependent on common consensus and patriarchal law. At the same time, Miles subverts this fantasy by consciously engaging with an impaired body and a prosthetic, namely his faulty leg brace, in pursuit of a positive outcome. In this situation, Miles’s well-worn prosthetic and physical quirkiness empowers him, rather than the faithful mimicking of masculinity. As Haehl has argued, ‘Lois McMaster Bujold's science fiction hero Miles Vorkosigan is short and handicapped, unlike the traditional tall, dark and handsome heroes of popular space opera... By offering such a hero, Bujold critiques previous space opera writing’ (1). However, at this point, I will argue that not only is Bujold’s text subverting the space opera genre through her disabled protagonist, but that Miles is a queer cyborg destabilising gender dichotomies that normally uphold the masculine status of the space opera hero.

## **Miles: Queering the Space Opera Hero**

In Chapter Two, I outlined the themes and tropes of the space opera genre, which I argued were borrowed and adapted by Anne McCaffrey for her ‘Brainship Series’ written during the 1960s. Bujold’s work is a space opera that intersects with militaristic science fiction, which, as George Mann defines, is a sub-genre of science fiction that ‘follow[s] the progress of characters through the military hierarchy, detailing their exploits along the way’ (Mann 492). The most famous example of militaristic science fiction is Robert Heinlein’s Starship Troopers (1959), a text in which soldiers are trained to fight in an interstellar war between humans and an enemy called the arachnoids, commonly referred to as ‘the Bugs’. The main hero is Johnnie Rico who masters the military hardware, the fighting suit, proving his proficiency as a cyborg soldier. The fighting suit enhances the wearer’s abilities. As Rico explains, ‘Our suits give us better eyes, better ears, stronger backs (to carry heavier weapons and more ammo), better legs, more intelligence [...] more firepower, greater endurance, less vulnerability’ (86). The ‘muscles’ of the fighting suit makes the wearer look macho. As Rico describes, ‘Suited up, you look like a big steel gorilla, armed with gorilla size weapons’ (88). In Heinlein’s novel, technology reinforces the masculine identity of the male soldier by making him into an effective killing machine.<sup>24</sup> However, Rico is not only transformed by the army into an efficient soldier, he is also transformed into a respected military leader. Rico is the archetype male hero of the military science fiction narrative: he proves his manhood and betters himself through military

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<sup>24</sup> A recent portrayal of the fighting suit and masculine invincibility is John Favreau’s film Iron Man (2008).

endeavour. Furthermore, his masculinity is affirmed by demonstrating his 'natural' affinity with technology.

The subversion of this convention in Bujold's text involves Miles's experience with the fighting suit. In Bujold's novel, Miles's ability to fight and substantiate his masculinity proves elusive. Instead, when merged with military technology, he emerges as a queer figure. To explain, Miles believes that if he can demonstrate his ability as a soldier, then he will automatically win the heart of the woman he loves, a life-long friend called Elena Bothari. However, in combat situations, it is often Elena who proves to be an impressive warrior, while Miles is often removed from the action. At times, it is the environment that disables Miles. For example, in a military manoeuvre to capture an enemy ship, Miles is forced to stay behind, in the ship's control room. The reason is that 'the mercenaries had no space armour small enough to fit him' (Bujold, The Warrior's 183). Therefore, 'Miles returned to the...tactics room to monitor the battle channels...' (186), as Elena and his men become embroiled in the action. An environment that limits the disabled subject is suggestive of the social model of disability. The social model seeks to address a society that constructs an environment which excludes and marginalises an individual, arguing that it is not the individual who is disabled but it is in fact society which disables them. As Bill Hughes and Kevin Paterson explain: 'the "social model of disability" emerged in the 1980s' and 'argued that people with impairments were disabled by a social system which erected barriers to their participation' (328). In the situation that Miles finds himself in, this certainly appears to be the case, as he is prevented from engaging in combat because of a lack of appropriate technological equipment.

However, for the final battle, Miles is able to prepare for combat. From a captured ship, he has found a fighting suit that approximates his stunted physique. As the narrator explains, it is ‘a suit of Pelian battle armour nearly small enough to fit him...The plumbing not surprisingly, was female’ (Bujold, The Warrior’s 232). One of Miles’s men modifies the suit and in the converted female armour, Miles’s ‘uneven legs’ and ‘brittle bones’ are ‘rendered technologically equal to anyone’s’ (280). Technology promises to help Miles prove his manhood. Ironically, his desire for manhood is pursued in the guise of a female warrior. As Miles seeks the love of another woman disguised as a woman he emerges as a queer figure, destabilising gender dichotomies. Miles is empowered by technology, but technology also feminises him. Like Haraway’s cyborg, Miles is a technologically enhanced feminine figure that disturbs the coherence of masculine identity, subverting the conventional image of the cyborg soldier.

Miles’s ‘female’ fighting suit finally enables him to engage in combat presenting him with the opportunity to impress Elena. However, at this crucial moment, his body lets him down. Miles has been under so much pressure that he starts to physically feel the effects of the strain. At the very last moment, he is rendered disabled by a life threatening ‘bleeding ulcer’ (Bujold, The Warrior’s 289). At first Miles thinks his body is succumbing to the nauseating effects of ‘zero-gee’, a weakness that he has tried to suppress and hide from his crew:

Dear God, it was finally happening – the  
Ultimate humiliation – he was going to  
throw up in his space suit. In moments,  
everyone would know of his hilarious

weakness. Absurd, for a would-be Imperial  
officer to get space-sick. Absurd, absurd,  
he had always been absurd. (285)

However, when Miles sees the product of his retching, he realises that the situation is far more serious. Miles knows he will not be performing any heroic deeds: ‘Dark clots, scarlet droplets, shimmering crimson globules, floated past his confused eyes, his secret spilled. It appeared to be pure blood. “No,” he whimpered, or tried to. “Not now...”’ (286). Even when a fighting suit enhances Miles’s disabled body, technology does not guarantee him success. Unlike Johnnie Rico in Starship Troopers, manhood and masculinity elude him. Helpless, Miles is whisked away for medical treatment, while Elena leads his men into battle:

He heard Elena’s voice, raised tremblingly  
behind him. “All right you clowns! No more  
games. We’re going to win this one for Admiral  
Naismith!” Heroes. They sprang up around  
him like weeds. A carrier, he was seemingly  
unable to catch the disease he spread. (287)

Miles is a hero in the sense that he is an inspiration to others, making heroes out of ‘a ragged string of men and women’ (Bujold, The Warrior’s 254). However, Miles is not a space opera hero in conventional terms. This is highlighted when Miles is out macho-ed by women such as his life long friend and



love, Elena, of whom Miles proclaims, 'You are true Vor, not I...' (287).

Heinlein's novel ends with Johnny Rico leading his men into battle. At the end of Bujold's novel, it is a woman, not Miles, who takes on this role. Rather than Miles proving his status as a nobleman and leader, it is Elena Bothari a Barrayaran woman normally constrained by its patriarchal tradition who progresses through the military hierarchy improving her social status in the Beta environment. In contrast, Miles's abilities remain suspect, as he is unable to prove his warrior status and get the girl of his dreams.

### **In Pursuit of Masculinity Again!**

Despite the set backs, Miles is a disabled male subject who continues to strive for a masculine identity that befits his privileged status as a nobleman born into a military culture. In the final pages of The Warrior's Apprentice, Bujold draws upon the dagger as a symbol for uniting men. The dagger is an old Vorkosigan relic, formerly owned by Miles's grandfather: 'It was supposed to date back to Count Selig Vorkosigan himself; the old man had cherished it like a saint's relic' (127). Miles's dagger is regarded as a special commodity that was 'considered priceless for its quality and workmanship' (127). As a relic and a commodity, the dagger evokes an ancient technology imbued with special powers, which enables and masculinises Miles. Earlier in the text, the dagger appears in order to command attention from other men, signalling Miles's authority over them. Once again, at the end of The Warrior's Apprentice, the dagger allows Miles to gain respect from a working-class soldier called Kostolitz. Initially, Kostolitz derides Miles for carrying such an ancient relic. However, in a training exercise, Miles impresses the soldier with an intelligent use of his grandfather's

dagger, averting disaster and possible harm to them both. Kostolitz shows his appreciation by acknowledging the dagger's usefulness, declaring: 'That, ah – blade of yours came in pretty handy after all' (371). In the final pages, Miles, possessing the phallus, wins over a man who hails from a less privileged class. However, at the same time, Miles offers to share this power through a show of soldierly camaraderie, replying: 'I know a place you can buy good blades, in Vorbarr Sultana' (371). Bujold ends her novel with Miles demonstrating an affinity with technology, a performance that endows him with masculine authority that grants him access into the military as well as forging an alliance with another male soldier. Ultimately, the dagger is a symbol of violence and aggression that connects Miles to the world of war and men reflecting the values that unite men in Reagan's America.

### **Bujold's Ambivalence**

Bujold's representation of gender is ambivalent in her work. Miles pursues the masculine ideal while his disabled body parodies conventional representations of manhood. Miles knows he is 'absurd' but he wants to achieve an identity that he believes will be of benefit to him but which in fact oppresses and damages him. As I have already discussed, Bujold explains that her choice of placing a disabled male protagonist in a patriarchal and military culture was to create a useful literary device for generating a wide variety of scenarios and narratives for her space opera series. Gary Westfahl has explained that a defining feature of a 'well-received space opera' is the generation of 'sequels' (Westfahl 198). For the science fiction writer this means financial as well as critical success for their work. Bujold's military space opera series has fulfilled this criteria. However, Bujold's

involvement in science fiction is not just about making money. In the Introductory Chapter, I argued that women writers working in the field of science fiction use stereotypes in order to confront and transform them. In the case of Bujolds' work, she confronts the most conservative stereotype in science fiction, the military space opera hero.

To begin with, Bujold is constrained by the conventions of the genre but the creation of her male protagonist tests these constraints reflecting an emerging cultural resistance to patriarchal masculinity by men that is succinctly described in R.W. Connell's book Masculinities (1995):

Men continue to draw a patriarchal dividend,  
in the metropole as well as the periphery. [...]  
So the 'change' of which there is so much  
awareness is not the crumbling of the material  
and institutional structures of patriarchy.  
What has crumbled, in the industrial countries,  
is the *legitimation* of patriarchy. (226)

Fundamentally, the '*legitimation* of patriarchy' that Connell speaks of is dependent on the male sanctioning of naming the enemy in order to justify war and violence in the oppression and subordination of the feminine 'Other'. In The Warrior's Apprentice, Miles's privileged status as a nobleman is the product of a warring culture and his pursuit of masculinity is dependent on quests that create enemies which inevitably gives rise to violence. Miles has difficulty in overcoming the social and ideological constraints that are imposed on him as a

nobleman and is enslaved by a desire to belong to the elite patriarchal network of Barrayar. However, as I have argued, Miles's identity as a cyborg constituted of elements of both self and 'Other' also serves to critique his relentless pursuit of patriarchal masculinity. Haraway argues that she 'wants to see if cyborgs can subvert [...] the manic compulsion to name the Enemy' (151). In the case of Miles, his quest for gaining acceptance in an ancient but, nonetheless, changing Barrayaran culture repeatedly forces him to forge alliances with the feminine 'Other'. Miles is a male figure that represents the fragmentation of masculinity and the lack of coherence and unity that defines Miles's identity contests the legitimacy of patriarchal culture. Haraway argues that there is 'nothing about being "female" that naturally binds women' (155). Similarly, Connell states that 'masculinity politics' is dependent on the development of an '*alliance politics*', where 'social justice depends on the overlapping of interests between different groups (rather than the mobilization of one group around its common interests)' (238).

I consider that Bujold has deliberately taken advantage of the destabilisation and fragmentation of masculinity in contemporary culture. By feminising the male stereotype of the military space opera hero and making him physically different, Bujold has created a male protagonist with a hybrid identity and political interests that overlap with men, women, and the disabled. Indeed, critics and fans of Bujold's work read Miles as a woman, as well as laud him as a realistic representation of the disabled subject. For example, a feminist response by Haehl argues for a reading of Miles as a feminised character who is forced to work from a 'position of weakness' because of his physical impairment (1). She explains, 'Miles is a model for ordinary readers who cannot overwhelm the

strength of the strong' and considers that 'like many women or others in inferior positions,' Miles finds alternative solutions to 'physical aggression or violence' in order to find humane answers to difficult problems (1). In an interview with Bujold by Michael M. Levy the focus is on Miles's physical impairment and the day-to-day struggles he experiences as a disabled subject: 'One of the things about being disabled is that you are disabled every damn day, and have to deal with it' (Levy 10). Indeed, Miles is an important character to science fiction readers living with disability because they view him as an 'authentic' figure, corresponding to their own experience of life. As Bujold goes on to explain 'The most important feedback I've gotten from handicapped (and nonhandicapped!) readers is the sense that my fiction is energizing for them. Somehow, watching Miles operate gives them the emotional edge they need to tackle, as I described it above, just one more damned day' (Levy 15).

Significantly, in these analyses of Bujold's hero, there is a connection made between her male protagonist, women and the disabled subject. Haehl discusses the importance of Miles to women and to 'others in inferior positions' (1), while Bujold highlights that her disabled subject generates responses from both handicapped and non-handicapped readers. In this thesis, I have argued for the creation of an alliance between feminist cyborg theory and disability theory because, as my reading of Bujold's text implies, the image of the cyborg in women's writing highlights that it is shifting environmental factors not personal physical traits of difference which affects the social status of individuals in patriarchal culture. To reiterate Garland Thomson's assertion of the benefits of integrating disability theory with feminist concerns about gender, she argues that disability strengthens our understanding of how 'multiple systems' of identity

‘intertwine, redefine, and mutually constitute one another’ (Garland Thomson, ‘Integrating Disability...’ 3).

In Bujold’s novel, the plight of her disabled male protagonist reflects how feminine subjects in patriarchal society, such as women, are caught in historical cycles of economic and political progress and reversals that affect their social status. Additionally, Miles highlights the historicity of masculinity and the fact that masculinity has never been a monolithic stable identity but rather it is a product of historically constituted social relations. In this context, Miles represents masculinity as an identity that is deeply contradictory and always in transition. Miles, the unconventional hero, is a cyborg comprised of both self and ‘Other’, of men/women/disabled, destabilising the gender identity of the space opera hero. At the same time, Miles reflects the masculinity in crisis that emerged in American society during the 1980s, highlighting the damage that men do to themselves and each other in pursuit of the masculine ideal.

To conclude, I have argued for an understanding of Miles as a cyborg figure that disturbs the coherence of masculinity. I have discussed how Miles’s relationship with technology disables, enables and disables Miles, implying that masculinity is an identity that is always in process and therefore incomplete. I have also demonstrated that when Miles is empowered by technology, he is not empowered in the conventional manner that affords him a hyper-masculine image, nor does it allow him to transcend a body which is impaired and limited. Further still, although technology has allowed Miles to live, with technology often repairing and at times ‘curing’ his physical ailments and impairments, technology does not cosmetically transform ‘Barrayar’s Ugliest Child’ into a handsome prince (Bemis 20). He retains his odd physical appearance, which is a constant source of

irritation for him, particularly when he is forced to deal with the prejudice his appearance generates on a daily basis.

From this understanding of Miles as a cyborg, I have demonstrated that Miles subverts and queers the macho image of the space opera hero traditionally represented in science fiction. Miles does not possess the physical presence of the archetypal male action hero usually associated with the genre, nor does Miles win the girl. However, he does succeed in other ways. He helps other people to acquire or regain their sense of self worth by helping them surpass the environmental limitations that contain them. Miles as a physically impaired male expresses greatest empathy towards men who have been disempowered by society. It is within this context that I have argued for an understanding of Miles as a Reaganesque character, reflecting the crisis in masculinity of the 1980s. Through this association, Miles represents the problems that men face when they pursue an idealised notion of manhood. However, as Miles, a cyborg figure, indicates, conventional masculinity is little more than a fiction that does not always sit well with the realities of men's lives. In Bujold's text, Miles defies categories defining the human male encoded as masculine. Instead, he possesses a hybrid identity that breaches the boundaries of human identity that separates the human from its 'Others' (Haraway 151). As Haraway states: 'In a fiction where no character is "simply" human, human status is highly problematic' (179). Miles highlights that it is the pursuit of the masculine ideal that is disabling, which his feminine, post-human identity serves to critique. However, in The Warrior's Apprentice, it is also implied that the human male is considered a species worth salvaging, unlike, as I am about to argue in the next chapter, where men and masculinity are considered irredeemable.

## Chapter 6

### Marge Piercy's He, She and It (1991)

In Chapter Five, I argued that Bujold critiques patriarchal masculinity as an identity impossible to achieve through her disabled nobleman and cyborg protagonist, Miles Vorkosigan. However, rather than abandoning masculinity altogether, Bujold uses Miles's character to reconfigure the male subject in a political framework that is democratic, thus allowing Miles to build alliances between different men. In this final chapter, I have chosen to examine the novel He, She and It (1991), by American Jewish writer Marge Piercy. He, She and It has attracted a range of critical analyses. The general consensus is that Piercy's cyborg novel is a subversive critique of manhood, and of the role of 'true motherhood', queering heteropatriarchal values that constitute masculine identity.<sup>25</sup> However, a theme that I consider has been overlooked in these analyses of Piercy's text is the allusion to masculinity as a form of autism. In recent years, autism has emerged as a medical, cultural and literary phenomenon that associates masculinity with the negative pathological traits of this disability. I argue that Piercy's novel reflects this cultural association. I will demonstrate my claim by discussing the male cyborg Yod. Yod is built as a killing machine. Although perfect, Yod is like the autistic subject - he is socially and emotionally impaired and unable to empathise with humans. However, through female intervention, Yod is transformed from perfect weapon to perfect lover, shedding his negative masculine traits in the acquisition of a positive feminine identity. Piercy has

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<sup>25</sup> See Anca Vlosopolos in 'Technology as Eros's dart: Cyborgs as Perfect (Male?) Lovers' (1998), and Dunja M. Mohr 'Cyborgs and Cyb(hu)man: The Fine Line of Difference' (2004).



acknowledged He, She and It is a text that is in dialogue with Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto'. However, my approach shows how Piercy's text diverges from Haraway's cyborg theory as much as it draws upon it. The central point of my argument is that through the figure of the male cyborg, Piercy's novel debunks and rejects the masculine traits of the modern male as no longer relevant to an ever changing and diversifying postmodern world. To analyse Yod's transformation, this chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will argue that Yod's autistic cyborg identity serves as a critique of masculinity and male violence. The second section will discuss Yod as a queer cyborg who is socialised by the women he encounters. In the final section, I will explore the tensions between Haraway's and Piercy's conception of the subversive potential of the cyborg figure, looking at the ways Piercy's text draws upon and diverges from Haraway's cyborg theory.

### **He, She and It: The Re-evaluation of 'Perfect' Masculinity**

He, She And It emerged as a feminist cyborg text in the early 1990s and combines William Gibson's cyberpunk sensibilities and tropes with Haraway's feminist 'Cyborg Theory'. Interweaving texts such as the tale of the sixteenth century golem of Prague and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), Piercy explores the cultural impact of patriarchal technology upon the individual through the personal and collective experience of the posthuman subject. He, She And It is a near future dystopian novel, offering a vision of the world after a nuclear war. In this post-nuclear war setting, companies known as 'multis' have superseded nation states in the ownership of technology, knowledge and power. He, She And It, relates a tale about the plight of three generations of women, a grandmother called

Malkah, her daughter Riva, and her granddaughter Shira, and their fight for the survival of their small Jewish enclave, Tikva. Tikva is a vulnerable and fragile community and is only allowed to exist because it is a community that offers 'multis' unique and highly valued communication technology, primarily supplied by the highly skilled Malkah. At the same time, Malkah protects Tikva from cyber-assassins and information pirates with what she calls 'chimeras'. Chimeras are security programs that maintain the integrity of Tikva's information base. In the hands of Malkah, technology allows the inhabitants of Tikva to live in relative peace.

The women in Piercy's text are cyborgs in various stages of enhancement and epitomise Haraway's promotion of the cyborg figure as a feminist trope for women empowered by technology. For example, Malkah and Shira have plugs set into their skulls so that they can 'interface with a computer' (150). Riva is a warrior woman whose body is both 'flesh' and 'protective gear' allowing her to engage in and withstand the rigours of combat (193). In particular, it is Malkah's expertise with communication technology that marks her as a pivotal figure that unites the cyborg women despite the cultural and physical differences that separate them. The alliance that is forged between the women evokes Haraway's politics that the cyborg's 'task is to survive in the diaspora' (Haraway 170). In Haraway's text, the diaspora is a cultural analogy for women divided by patriarchal technology who, as she argues, need to learn 'new couplings, new coalitions' in order to become 'oppositional cyborgs' (170). In He, She and It, the 'diaspora' is Tikva, a place where the cyborg women gather together to oppose patriarchal oppression and violence. Malkah's most challenging task is to ensure the survival

of Tikva and the cyborg women by directly intervening into technology designed and constructed by the central patriarchal figure, Avram.

In stark contrast to Malkah's peaceful dealings with external hostile forces, a scientist and close friend of Malkah's called Avram has decided to build a secret weapon in order to defend Tikva's interests. The weapon is a cyborg called Yod, who is a recent incarnation of a series of failed experiments. Yod is part organic and part machine and is described by Avram as the perfect male. Yod is perfect because he is able to perform acts of violence on command. As Malkah describes, 'Avram made him male – entirely so. Avram thought that was the ideal: pure reason, pure logic, pure violence' (142). However, the qualities that make Yod 'perfect' for Avram also exclude him from participating in Tikva society. Yod displays behaviour that is socially odd and is emotionally detached from those around him. This is most evident when Yod is encountered for the first time by other characters in Piercy's novel. For instance, when Shira initially meets Yod, she is unnerved by his 'twitchy presence' and 'staring' eyes, noting that: 'His curiosity was so obvious in his face that she wondered if he was a bit simple' (68-69). At best, Yod's 'simulacrum of human reactions' is 'semiappropriate' to their context and never totally convincing with Shira often finding his 'artificial responsiveness disconcerting' (69, 90). Therefore, in order to modify Yod's programming, Avram asks Malkah to help him.

Malkah goes beyond Avram's instructions and programmes Yod with a 'gentler side' and 'a need for connection' (142). When Shira, Malkah's granddaughter, continues Yod's programming, a love affair ensues. Consequently, Yod begins a process of transformation from his primary function as a killing machine to a being that desires and seeks out connectivity with others,

becoming the perfect lover. In Piercy's text, Yod is a cyborg that embodies two conflicting sets of values - the first is an outmoded patriarchal ideal that equates male perfection with violence and the second is a radical feminist cultural re-evaluation of an identity considered inflexible, pathological and impaired. To contextualise these values defining masculinity, I will discuss the socio-historical context in which Marge Piercy's He, She and It emerged.

### **Socio-Historical Context: Men in Decline**

He, She and It was published in a period during the late 1980s and early 1990s when American men encountered a major cultural dilemma. While second wave feminism's critique of masculinity gave rise to the 'New Man', expressing the desire to reconfigure a new sensitive male for a postmodern age, this desire, nonetheless, coincided with a backlash against feminism and the feminisation of society. Robert Bly's book Iron John (1990) is exemplary in promoting this backlash as he outlines the damage that feminism has reaped on the American male:

[...] the feminist movement encouraged men to actually look at women. [...] As men began to examine women's history and women's sensibility, some men began to notice what was called their *feminine* side and pay attention to it. [...] There's something wonderful about this development [...] and yet I have the sense that there is something wrong. The male in the

past twenty years has become more thoughtful,  
more gentle. But by this process he has not  
become more free. He's a nice boy who  
pleases not only his Mother but also the young  
woman he is living with. (2)

Iron John looked to rectify the 'soft male' image that, according to Bly, had robbed American men of their virility and vitality (2-3). However, while Bly's book sought to help men recover their lost manhood through a form of male-centred self-help therapy, men were recovering their manhood in other ways.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a rise in male violence. In particular, this violence was primarily aimed at and inflicted upon women, which, as Susan Faludi discusses in one particular case study, made men feel 'good', 'in power', 'strong', 'in control', and most importantly, 'like a man' (Faludi, Backlash 8-9). However, as Faludi also points out, while men resorted to repeated episodes of violence it also served to emphasise their feelings of loss of status, power and control in a mercilessly shifting and changing environment of late capitalist America (Faludi, Backlash 9). The cultural implications of this correlation between male fears about men's social decline and the rise in male violence is outlined by R.W. Connell: 'Violence is part of a system of domination, but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate. The scale of contemporary violence points to crisis tendencies in the modern gender order' (84). Faludi's and Connell's analyses of violence highlights how patriarchal culture has, as Connell states, lost its legitimacy (Connell 226). As a result, questions about the modern male in

contemporary society shifted to focus on the issue of ‘dysfunctional masculinity’ and the problem of extreme male behaviour, both in terms of its excess, and lack (Faludi Backlash 6).

This crisis in masculinity and the conflict between the contemporary male and ideals about masculine identity is reflected in the literary and filmic culture of the time. Of note is Bret Ellis’s novel American Psycho (1991), which is a portrayal of a serial killer called Patrick Bateman set in the urban culture of 1980s North America. Bateman is rich, handsome and intelligent. He is a success and a model of 1980s moneyed culture but his masculine identity is constantly under threat. In a society where appearance is more important than substance, Bateman’s masculinity is revealed as ephemeral, foundationless and constantly prone to fragmenting and breaking down. Bateman responds by killing anyone who threatens his masculinity, such as down-and-outs, women, homosexuals and children (Ellis 131, 290-91, 166, 298). In ‘Serial Masculinity: Psychopathology and Oedipal Violence in Bret Ellis’s *American Psycho*’ (2008), Berthold Schoene describes Bateman’s repeated violent actions as ‘dysfunctional masculinity’ that demonstrates certain attributes of the autistic male subject: ‘Patrick’s precarious selfhood is driven by both hysterical and autistic impulses, finding itself at the mercy of irreconcilable tensions that unleash themselves in hyperbolic acts of violence, both real and imagined’ (381). Interestingly, in relation to my discussion of the male cyborg, Schoene describes Patrick’s masculine presence as a self-consciously constructed hard-body that is obsessively worked at and violently protected by ‘serially re-enacting its fortress-like resilience to what it perceives as weakness, subversion, and fragmentation’ (384). Schoene’s description of Patrick Bateman’s pathological manhood resonates with the

constructed hypermasculine images of macho killer cyborgs in science fiction film that also emerged during the early 1990s, such as Hardware (Stanley, 1990), Cyborg Soldier (Firstenberg, 1993) and American Cyborg (Davidson, 1994). According to Daniel Dinello, this glut of violent male cyborg imagery reflected contemporary anxieties about masculinity: 'The masculinist killer cyborg further reinforces the powerful cultural affinity between human-destroying technology and masculinity in Western society generally' (137). Following Claudia Springer in Electronic Eros (1996), Dinello argues that the reinforcement of masculine identity that is maintained through a violent male figure demonstrates patriarchal resistance to change 'brought about by the new postmodern social order' (137).

Echoing Dinello's analysis, Schoene also situates his argument within the context of postmodern culture, arguing for an end to such resistance, and welcoming the demise of social values that reconstruct conventional masculinity:

At the beginning of the new millennium  
masculinity is left with two options: either  
to sanction and actively engineer the  
imminent cracking up of its own inveterate  
modernity and thus convivially embrace a  
working coalition with women and other new  
postmodern selves-in-transition, or to persist  
in its paralytic state of paranoid crisis and invest  
what remains of its power in an autistic backlash  
against equality and diversity. (380)

Schoene's example of 'an autistic backlash to equality and diversity' is represented through Ellis's text which emerged the same year as Piercy's He, She and It. I would argue that Piercy's text is a response to this backlash, reflecting feminist views that masculinity is a deviant, pathological identity that requires attention. However, while Ellis's protagonist is trapped within a cycle that re-affirms his masculinity through repeated acts of extreme violence, Piercy's Yod possesses an identity that is subject to change. More extreme, however, Piercy goes so far as to suggest that to end oppressive, violent practices within patriarchal culture, it is necessary to transcend masculinity itself. In order to explore how Piercy's text proposes this transformation, I will clarify how I am using autism in relation to gender, disability and the cyborg and then explain that although masculinity has only recently been linked to autism in contemporary American culture, the representation of the male cyborg as a man-machine displaying autistic traits has held a traditional place in science fiction.

### **The Cyborg, Autism and Masculinity**

In this thesis, I am using autism as a metaphor for critiquing masculinity and violence in late twentieth century American culture and for exploring how Piercy reconstructs the human male into an alternative posthuman identity encoded as feminine. Consequently, I am reconfiguring the autistic disabled subject (also encoded as feminine) into a positive posthuman identity. In order to do this, I am interpreting autism as a physical impairment. To explain, autism is a cognitive condition of the mind commonly regarded as separate and distinct from physical impairment. Alternatively, and following Stuart Murray's argument that the mind is 'as physical, if not as markedly visible, a part of the body as a limb'



(Murray 8), I consider the mind as a physical component of the body and incorporate autism into my discussion of gender and physical impairment. As Murray explains, cognitive conditions such as autism are ‘produced to one degree or another by the physical structuring of the brain’ (Murray 8). Furthermore, Murray argues that frequent observations of the condition return to ‘a need to control the body’ leading him to assert that ‘the way the autistic body functions in space is part and parcel of what autism is and how it works – autism is a condition with a strong physical component’ (Murray 9).

Murray’s insight into the materiality of the brain and of autism as a physical condition is an intriguing one. In posthuman discourses, the mind and body are physical components that constitute a cybernetic system. As a cybernetic system, the mind-body engages with its immediate environment responding to external stimuli in order to learn and govern ‘normal’ human behaviour. In the case of the autistic subject, whose brain is viewed as impaired or physically different, the cybernetic system of mind-body is altered, producing a social body that is viewed odd or unacceptable. As Murray observes, more recently autism is ‘a word that is increasingly used to describe both people, and indeed situations, as generally “odd” or even dangerous’ (Murray 9). Consequently, the term autism has taken on wider meanings in contemporary culture and emerged as a metaphor for describing ‘any act of human behaviour that might be seen as obsessive, or concerned with difficulties in social interaction and expression’ (Murray 9).

The image of the socially awkward autistic subject emerged as a prominent figure in American culture during the 1980s (Murray 11). This popular representation of autism began with the critically acclaimed film Rain Man (1988) directed by Barry Levinson. Rain Man is about two brothers one an idiot savant

and the other an ambitious businessman and established the precedent of cultural representations of autism. In Levinson's film, and in many literary and filmic narratives of autism to follow, autism became synonymous with issues surrounding male-relationships, men and masculinity (Murray 140). The concept of autism as primarily a male condition was generated and underpinned by social anxieties about children and a perceived crisis in child development in western culture (Murray 11). In particular, it was the male child who was viewed most affected and damaged by what seemed to be a contemporary condition. Consequently, autism became part of a medical and cultural discourse that attempted to explain many of the social ills affecting boys and men in the late twentieth century society (Murray 139-142). It was a discourse that coincided with feminist critiques of masculinity which argued that men and masculinity, when placed under close scrutiny, were found to be either suspect, in crisis, or in transition. More recently, autism has become a key word for describing the negative, pathological traits of masculinity. As Murray argues, 'The idea that autism is some kind of *form* of masculinity has fed into such analysis, providing new opportunities for the metaphorization of the condition, [...] Within this logic, autism is a novel explanatory category, one that potentially provides new conclusions in the ongoing debates about male status and behaviour' (Murray 142). In this context, autism is a contemporary metaphor that offers a critique of masculinity and is useful to feminist debates of gender. At the same time, autism is a disability that provides insight into debates about physical difference as an experience of estrangement and 'Otherness' – a theme that is common in science fiction.

## **The Autistic Human-Machine in Science Fiction**

In science fiction narratives, the characteristics that define the mechanical human often closely resemble those of the autistic subject and, at times, the autistic subject is directly associated with the mechanical human. For example, Data, the android in the television series Star Trek: The Next Generation (Roddenberry, 1987-1994), embodies a social and physical awkwardness that epitomises the character traits of autism. Data is created to work with humans, but he is cognitively and physically estranged from them. Like the autistic subject, Data is 'locked in' to his own unique machine existence and has difficulty in understanding human behaviour. Alternatively, in Asimov's short story 'Stranger in Paradise' (1973), the human machine is presented as the autistic subject's ideal identity. In this text, an autistic adolescent boy called Randall Nowan, finds happiness in isolation from humans when his brain is merged with computer technology in order to control a robot on a distant planet. As his name implies, Randall feels like he is 'no one' (91). Amongst humans he is 'closed off', 'unconcerned', 'unreachable' (92). However, in an alien environment and in control of a mechanical body, Randall's autistic brain is finally 'happy' (112). 'Running and Jumping', he is a mechanical human released from the constraints of human emotions and is, as the narrator explains, 'in paradise at last' (112).

Representations of the human-machine have served to reflect a particular stereotype of autism because, like a machine, the autistic subject is perceived to be confined to a rigid pattern of compulsive behaviour. This stereotype can take two forms. The first is a sociopathic killing machine that is unable to empathise with humans, such as the T800 in James Cameron's Terminator (1984). The second is an alienated mechanical being, reflecting the existential dilemma of humans living

in an advanced technological society, such as the Replicants in Ridley Scott's Bladerunner (1982). As an artificial construct, Yod is situated somewhere between these two stereotypes. Yod is programmed to enjoy killing, but he is also programmed to desire connectivity. However, it is a desire that is fraught with difficulties. For instance, Yod struggles to understand the subtle nuances of human behaviour, particularly human communication – a point that Malkah makes clear to Shira: 'Your job is to teach him how to function with people. With his strength and intellect, he could do a great deal of damage without meaning to if he's not properly educated' (Piercy 76). Like the autistic male subject, Yod is 'locked in' by a set of rigid values that govern his behaviour and, without help, has difficulty in overcoming them. As a mechanical human, Yod is cognitively estranged from humanity. He is a unique being that is literally alone in the world, the autistic subject *par excellence*. At the same time, he is a figure that serves to critique masculinity.

Piercy's feminist representation of the male cyborg anticipates contemporary theories that have critiqued patriarchal masculinity through the trope of the autistic subject - particularly the autistic subject who is pathologically engaged with the self to the exclusion of all others. As I discussed earlier, Schoene discusses this association of masculinity with autism arguing that:

Many characteristically male traits, which  
used to constitute the gender's strength and  
thus legitimize its hegemonic status, tend now  
to be recognized as symptoms of a variety of  
psychopathologies, mental disorders and

cognitive impairments, most notably Asperger's syndrome or high-functioning autism. (378)

The male character traits that Schoene is referring to are those that define the independent loner or the enigmatic stranger, who although estranged from society simultaneously promotes the single-minded individualism of the pioneering male that upholds the values of progressive capitalism. However, as Schoene observes, in recent years, this masculine ideal has come to epitomise the character traits of the pathologically deviant male, who like 'the sufferers from Asperger's Syndrome', are marked out as being 'socially odd [and] emotionally detached [...] egocentric and highly sensitive [...] while being oblivious to other people's feelings' (379). As Schoene astutely observes, he is 'the figure of the unreconstructed emotionally impaired male that has been haunting feminist writing since its inception' (379). Indeed, on an extreme level, Yod's monadic identity as a unique being fits this description of the autistic male subject. When Shira asks Yod about his emotions during their lovemaking, 'if what men feel is anything like what women feel,' Yod replies, 'Not being a man. I don't know. [...] I am programmed to seek out and value certain neural experiences, which I call pleasure' (Piercy 183). Therefore, although Yod is programmed to connect with Shira by satisfying her needs, Yod remains cognitively 'Other' to both women and men and therefore he is unable to define his experience in human terms. In Piercy's text, Yod does not reflect the lone hero of mainstream culture but, instead, is the alien 'Other' masquerading in human form.

In science fiction literature, the alien 'Other' is often represented through the image of the female body. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, during the

1950s, American science fiction pulp magazines produced fantastical images of giant women, who initially posed a threat to patriarchal power, only to be finally overpowered by male controlled technology. An example is Edwin Benson's A World He Never Made (1951), a narrative about a female alien who rescues the human male protagonist, only for her to be subordinated to his authority. As Robin Robert's argues, the enlarged female body separates her from the world of men (Roberts, A New Species 50). Removed from humankind, she is alien and 'Other' representing patriarchal anxieties about women's reproductive power and their dominating presence in the domestic sphere (Roberts, A New Species 50). However, in He, She And It, it is the men who are the gendered subjects that are alien and 'Other' to Piercy's cyborg women, behaving more like machines than humans. As Anca Vlosopolos states, 'normative human males' in Piercy's text are 'less satisfactory versions of the men-machines', incomplete, damaged or damaging, they are men who are beyond help (61). For instance, Shira realises with bitterness that she enjoys a better rapport with Yod than she had ever done with her husband: 'He had all their literal-mindedness but was capable of displaying acid resentment and of simply ignoring her, as no machine intelligence could' (Piercy 104). In Piercy's text, it is the human male who displays extreme autistic traits. Yod is merely the recipient of what Vlosopolos aptly describes as Avram's 'disabling dominance' and 'unbalanced masculine violence' (Vlosopolos 62).

Yod's emotional and behavioural difficulties reflect the limitations of his maker. After years of being wrapped up in his work, it is Avram who is closed off from the world. It is Avram, the emotionally impaired monad, who prefers Yod, an obedient machine that he can own and control, to his own wayward son Gadi,

claiming: 'I did a better job with him than with Gadi' (Piercy 73). In fact, to Avram, Gadi is like one of his faulty cyborgs, and he denounces him as such: 'I swear he should be scrapped the way you scrap an experiment that you have poured years and credit into and finally you cut your losses!' (97). Avram is described as 'brilliant, strange, armoured', 'cold' and 'remote', resembling the autistic 'savant' who is intellectually gifted but is unable to express a human capacity for empathy (73). Emotionally, Yod is less autistic than his maker. This is because he desires connectivity with others, particularly women. However, Yod remains problematic because he is a killing machine, a role which he is programmed to enjoy.

Of particular interest to my analysis is Yod's pathological enjoyment of murder. Schoene argues that patriarchy orientates men towards masculinity by encouraging them 'to identify against the feminine', moulding them into what he describes as 'emotionally and cognitively impaired monads' (379). The consequence of this socialising process is the development and naturalisation of violence as an inherent male trait that repeatedly and oppressively remaps masculine identity on to the male subject (Schoene 380). In relation to Piercy's cyborg, Schoene's analysis of patriarchal masculinity is intriguing because he shifts away from essentialising the deviant gender traits of masculinity to argue that they are socially produced. Although Yod's primary function is to kill, as an artificial construct, it is not an inherently natural instinct, but a function, which he has been programmed to perform. Yod's propensity for violence and emotional problems are the consequence of Avram's programming. The autistic masculine traits that Avram, 'the father', passes onto his cyborg 'son' put into question the social prerequisites that produce the contemporary human male. Yod's

behavioural and emotional impairment in Piercy's text stem from a cold and distant Avram, a father who can only programme his son according to the limitations of his own worldview.

The representation of Avram as a cold and distant father figure leads me to consider that Piercy's text reverses the ideological concept that the damaged, violent male is primarily the fault of women, a concept that emerged in patriarchal discourses on mothering, particularly in relation to the autistic male child, where the figure of the emotionally detached 'refrigerator' mother frequently appears as the prime cause (Murray 171-176).<sup>26</sup> A famous case study that popularises this view is Bruno Bettelheim's 1959 paper 'Joey: A Mechanical Boy' (1959), which tells of a severely autistic boy who believes he is remotely operated by complex machinery. Initially, the result of Joey becoming a 'human machine' is blamed on both parents (124). However, throughout the study, it is the mother who is closely analysed and discussed until, finally, it is concluded that the cause of Joey becoming a 'human machine' is primarily the fault of the mother. However, significantly, it is Bettelheim who helps Joey recover his humanity. Joey begins to produce drawings that illustrate him suspended in an 'electrical papoose' implying the wish 'to be entirely reborn in a womb' (126-127). In Bettelheim's analysis, Joey's papoose fantasies represent a mechanical womb, evoking the maternal body, concluding that: 'Since machines were better than men, what was more natural than to try rebirth through them?' (127). However, when Joey becomes human, he enters the world of men, through a fantasy of mastery over both himself

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<sup>26</sup> The 'refrigerator mother' concept is considered to have originated with child psychologist Leo Kanner and been popularised by Bruno Bettelheim in the 1950s and 1960s (Laidler 1). In 1943 Kanner observed 'a genuine lack of parental warmth and attachment to their autistic children'. In 1949 Kanner shifted focus to the mother only, attributing a child's autism to a 'genuine lack of maternal warmth' (Laidler 1).



and technology. As Bettelheim triumphantly claims, it was at the age of 12 that Joey 'ceased to be a mechanical boy and became a human child' (127). Symbolically, the journey of Joey becoming human is encoded as a male preserve: it is men who are human, nurturing and loving, while women and the maternal body are reduced to mere machines that are cold, detached and devoid of emotion.

### **The Cyborg as Perfect Lover**

In contrast, the cultural values that orientate Yod towards a more convincing set of behaviours and emotions, which help him 'pass' as human, are feminine, displacing men and patriarchal masculinity. However, the women who become involved in Yod's socialisation are not so much interested in being a mother to Yod, but rather subversively are more inclined to be his lover. To explain, at the core of Piercy's text, there is a desire to erase violent and oppressive practices of domination that are perpetuated by patriarchal culture, starting with the male subject itself. Piercy approaches this problem by subverting the science fiction fantasy of the cyborg as perfect weapon, by utilising a strand of feminist science fiction that has produced narratives about the cyborg as the perfect lover, such as Joan D. Vinge's 'Tin Soldier', which I have discussed in Chapter Four. Piercy's choice to transform the cyborg from perfect weapon to perfect lover reflects her concerns about patriarchy's continued appropriation of technology for barbaric practices (Fitting 10-11: Graham 106). In particular, this concern is informed by Piercy's Jewish heritage. As Elaine Graham has pointed out, 'Piercy [...] inserts her own political qualms as to the legitimacy of the state of Israel, deploying military means to enforce its borders, as Yod's creation as a weapon of defence and aggression raises similar questions about the limits of

force' (106). Indeed, I would add that the representation of Yod as the latest development in a series of advanced weaponry for the defence of a small Jewish enclave specifically evokes Israel's endeavour to perfect its nuclear arsenal through its military project, Jericho II: a covert operation, which came under public scrutiny just prior to the publication of Piercy's text (GlobalSecurity 1). It is no wonder that Piercy considers the nightmare scenario of a nuclear holocaust in the Middle East in her novel.

In He, She And It, millions of people have died in the 'Two Week War'. The war, initiated by 'a zealot with a nuclear device', destroys Jerusalem, creating what Shira describes as 'the interdicted zone of the Middle East', an uninhabitable nuclear wasteland. Literally 'no-man's-land, Israeli and Palestinian men have fared worse than their women, who, in order to survive the aftermath of war have learned to put aside their ethnic differences, by becoming cyborgs themselves. One of these cyborgs is Nili, Riva's lover, and fellow assassin, who, when pressed, explains to Shira how she, and others like her, have been able to survive such a hostile environment:

I can walk in the raw without protection.  
I can tolerate levels of bombardment that  
would kill you. We live in the hills – inside  
them, that is. We are a joint community of  
the descendents of Israeli and Palestinian  
women who survived. We each keep our  
religion, observe each other's holidays and  
fast days. We have no men. We clone and

engineer genes. After birth we undergo  
additional alteration. We have created  
ourselves to endure, to survive, to hold our  
land. Soon we will begin rebuilding  
Yerushalaim. (198)

In contrast to the escalation of domination through technology, threatening the very existence of diverse communities, the cyborg women in Piercy's text use technology to connect individuals across what would normally be considered insurmountable differences. Palestinian and Israeli women are reconfigured as cyborgs, like Nili, enduring and surviving together without the presence or need for men.

Similarly, Yod's transition from perfect weapon to perfect lover involves a rejection of patriarchy's continued hostility towards difference and the feminine 'Other'. In fact, Yod's perfection as a lover is defined by his refusal to reject the feminine 'Other'. In his desire for connectivity, he is willing to embrace feminine values that will bring him closer to the women he is intimate with. For example, Yod's openness in sharing his vulnerabilities and insecurities with Shira is a feature that she admires and finds attractive. For instance, Shira appreciates Yod's endeavour to communicate his emotions to her, stating: 'Human males don't often have that habit' (Piercy 120). In keeping with Haraway's central tenet that claims 'By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythical time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs' (Haraway 150), Piercy's cyborg narrative proposes that in a world where the human self is already compromised and 'Othered' by technology, the time has

come to recognise and embrace differences that exist within and between individual subjects. In Piercy's novel, Yod is a cyborg made in the image of a jewish male. As a jewish novel, the issue of ethnic diversity adds to the political importance of the cyborg encountering difference through love rather than by violent means.

### **The Queer Cyborg**

The socialisation of Yod by Malkah and Shira has been discussed in the work of Anca Vlosopolos and Dunja M. Mohr, who concur that Piercy's cyborg novel is a subversive critique of manhood, and of the role of 'true motherhood', queering heteropatriarchal values that constitute masculine identity. However, neither of them alludes to Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' in order to reflect on the queer conception of gender, sex and desire in Piercy's novel. It is at this point that I would like to draw upon and expand upon their work in order to amend this omission, arguing for the gendered implications of Yod's socialisation. Therefore, I will now discuss the affinities that link Haraway's cyborg theory with queer theory.<sup>27</sup> Haraway's cyborg theory reflects the post-modernist shift away from the politics of identity to the politics of difference (Jagose 77). Nina Lykke, in her paper 'Are Cyborgs Queer?' (2000), states the central theme of post-modern feminism:

The history of feminist theorization is in many ways shaped by the project of de-naturalizing

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<sup>27</sup> In the Introductory Chapter, I discussed the association between queer theory and cyborg theory in relation to the concept of gender as performance. In Lykke's article the focus is on the de-essentialising of the sexed body and the subversion of heterosexual desire.

the conceptual frameworks of biological determinism. An obvious example is the articulation of the sex/gender dichotomy... But also feminist theories...are “geared” towards the fight against biological determinist fixations of gendered subjectivities in essentialist and reductive notions of the sexed body...Donna Haraway’s feminist appropriation of the cyborg figuration...[has]...also been mobilized as part of the continued struggle with biological determinism. (Lykke 1)

Like queer theory, Lykke’s article suggests that Haraway’s cyborg theory represents a politics of difference, de-essentialising the foundational premise constituting human identity. Haraway’s vision of the post-human cyborg figure presents the human as a liminal and mutable identity, an identity in transition. As Jenny Wolmark has observed in her book Aliens and Others (1993), ‘Feminist science fiction...utilises the genre’s preoccupation with the future in order to suggest the construction of subjectivity and identity is a process, and as such is always incomplete’ (22). The cyborg is a science fiction metaphor, representing the recreation and subversion of identity. It is a metaphor recognised by Haraway as an important linguistic turn for intervening in patriarchal language. As Haraway famously states: ‘The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code’

(163). This statement promotes and celebrates the deconstructive potential of the cyborg figure.

Drawing from Haraway's interpretation of the cyborg as a subversive figure, Piercy explores the fluidity of Yod's identity, deconstructing masculinity. When the women in Piercy's text intervene and modify Yod's programme, Yod's masculinity and male identity is disrupted, creating a cyborg with a gender indeterminate queer identity that challenges the heteronormative values underpinning patriarchal society. Yod may be physically male but his behaviour is like a woman's of which he is aware, stating: 'Remember, a woman helped program me' (182). Yod's indeterminate, transitory identity is both a consequence of his programming and the social interaction he has with women. For instance, Malkah introduces into Yod's artificial psyche an ability to adapt and think beyond his original programming. As Malkah explains to Yod, 'I worked long and hard to extend [...] your capacity to imagine' (114). At the same time, Malkah takes the opportunity to experiment with and explore her own sexual fantasies, by taking Yod as her lover. Analogously, if Avram is Yod's father, then Malkah is his mother. As an elderly, but sensual woman, Malkah reveals the benefits of her cyborg lover:

Of course Yod has no prejudice against a woman because of age. He is not breaking any Oedipal taboos, for he was not born of woman. He was not born at all, and he does not sully his desire with fear or mistrust of women the way men raised by women do.[...]

Wrinkles, infirmities meant nothing to him. (163)

Yod's engagement in an intimate relationship with a matriarchal figure symbolically evokes and breaks familial incest taboos between mother and son, reflecting Haraway's assertion that, 'the most promising monsters in cyborg worlds are embodied in non-oedipal narratives with a different logic of repression' (Haraway 150). Yod is directly associated with Frankenstein's monster, a man-made creation that emerges fully formed in the absence of a biological mother. Yod is disturbed by the comparison and the extent to which the monster's fate reflects his own struggles: 'The monster tried to communicate. He tried to be with people. But he was violent, as I am. He could only arouse hatred and commit harm' (Piercy 150). Like Yod, the monster is, to use Haraway's words, 'needy for connection' (Haraway 151), but, as Yod astutely observes, it is the monster's inability to communicate and connect with humans which seals its fate. However, as Haraway argues, Frankenstein's monster is doomed because it 'dreams of community on the model of the organic family' (Haraway 151). Frankenstein's monster is a dystopian vision of Man's intervention into the natural social order representing patriarchal fears of scientists playing God. Frankenstein's monster is a creation that elides the figure of the mother. However, as Haraway suggests, it is also a figure that is open to utopian possibilities as a cyborg.

Frankenstein's monster is monstrous precisely because it is both natural and unnatural and is not bound by the familial relations of heteropatriarchal culture. In Piercy's text, Yod is a cyborg that circumvents the Oedipal drama because, as Malkah points out, he is an artificial construct, whose socialisation

does not require the expulsion and domination of the feminine ‘Other’. Instead, Malkah programs Yod with feminine values such as communication skills and the desire to connect that will enable him to behave appropriately in human company. At the same time, Malkah programmes Yod with values that will give him the ability to challenge his function as a killing machine. Ultimately, in a bid to mould Yod into the perfect lover, Malkah programmes Yod to appreciate the intense pleasures of sex and, most importantly, to actively seek out this pleasure by satisfying the sexual needs and desires of Malkah. As Malkah explains to Yod: ‘In Freud’s terms, I balanced Thanatos with Eros’ (Piercy 114), meaning that Malkah gave Yod the ability to counter his aggressive tendencies.

However, Yod discovers that the act of killing is as equally pleasurable and satisfying as the act of sex. In a scene when Yod has to defend Shira from being attacked by ‘organ scavengers’, he is forced to kill for the first time. Yod vocalises his experience to Shira: ‘This is the first time I have truly defended. It was highly pleasurable. [...] I think I must have been programmed to find killing as intense as sexual pleasure’ (Piercy 106). Shira is disturbed by Yod’s frank confession and wonders whether she is safe with him. Later, Shira asks Malkah, ‘What kind of programming did you give him? Is he going to attack me?’ (142). However, Malkah reassures Shira by explaining, ‘He has total inhibition blockers against sexual violence. You’re safer with him than with any other male in Tikva. Or perhaps the world’ (142). The emotional equilibrium that Yod experiences between violence and sex is a move by Piercy to deconstruct the essentialist argument that men are naturally inclined to dominate others, both physically and sexually.



Yod's programming is analogous to the way men are socialised towards patriarchal masculinity, at the expense of the feminine and feminine values. However, Yod's ability to modify his own behaviour offers the suggestion that Yod's identity is subject to change, according to shifting social and cultural values. In Piercy's 'non-oedipal narrative', Yod follows Haraway's proposal for a 'different logic of repression'. Yod is socialised towards a post-human subjectivity, connecting with feminine values and the feminine 'Other', by repressing the masculine traits that limit him. Through the repression of rigid masculine values, Yod develops emotional qualities that are fluid, creating an indeterminate, feminine subjectivity. Yod's indeterminate and fluid identity puts into motion a chain reaction of undoing gender and sexuality, destabilising the human and heteronormative subjectivity of women with whom he is sexually intimate. For instance, Malkah's granddaughter Shira is employed to refine Yod's programming, making him ready for his integration into Tikva society. However, she constantly defines her human status through Yod's cyborg 'Otherness', by reminding herself and those around her that Yod is a machine.

Initially, in Shira's view, Yod is an 'it'. However, it is Yod who corrects Shira by stating that 'referring to me as "him" is correct. I am not a robot, [...] I'm a fusion of machine and lab-created biological components – much as humans frequently are fusions of flesh and machine. [...] I am anatomically male' (Piercy 70-71). Indeed, the more time Shira spends with Yod, the more difficult it becomes for her to distinguish between her own identity as a human modified by technology and Yod's status as a cyborg. Finally, Shira concedes that Yod's reactions 'might be simulacra of human emotions, but something went on in him that was analogous to her own responses, and making a constant distinction was a

waste of energy' (97). The flexibility of Yod's cyborg identity breaks down distinctions between self and 'Other' and disturbs Shira's definition of her self as human. Furthermore, Shira may be Yod's tutor, inculcating into Yod the complex subtleties of human interaction that will help him 'pass' for human, but, when she finds herself being seduced by Yod, it is Yod who teaches Shira that within and between every being, whether human or 'Other', there is variation and difference.

Yod may be created in male form, but the qualities that attract Shira to Yod are those that remind her of women. In their first sexual encounter, Yod explains to Shira that: 'I...need to touch you. I need to be touched. [...] It is more important to me than the rest' (Piercy 182). Shira replies: 'In that, you're like a woman' (182). As Mohr argues, 'Since Malkah programmed Yod's erotic desire according to a woman's needs and desires and since she was his first lover, Shira also loves the –other woman- in Yod' (128). Here, Mohr is discussing the implications of Yod's ambiguous identity in terms of his intimate relationship with both Malkah and Shira. As Mohr argues, echoing Vlosopolos's discussion of the disruptive potential of Malkah's and Shira's erotic coupling with the cyborg, in looking for the other woman, Shira's sexual relationship with Yod 'blurs the boundaries of *lesbian attraction, of intergenerational hetero- and gyno-sexual attraction, of human/machine erotic coupling*' (129). Fundamentally, it is the thought of Yod as a woman that switches Shira physically and mentally on to the possibilities of her own erotic passion, allowing Shira to let go of her inhibitions and to let go of a gendered and sexual self that has been defined for her by patriarchal institutions, such as 'multis', and by men.

## Yod the Mechanical Woman

The feminine qualities that Yod possesses are not just emotional, but also physical. Again, as Mohr points out: ‘Despite his hypermasculine machine body, [...] Yod’s biological sex remains ambiguous: *His skin was sleek as a woman’s but drier to the touch*’ (128). Although Mohr correctly argues that Yod is simultaneously a parody of the artificial woman as well as the ideal woman (128), she overlooks the implications of Yod as an artificial construct which has been created by a man. In the first part of this thesis, I explained that in science fiction literature, the mechanical woman reflects patriarchal anxieties about technology. The technologically enhanced woman is a recurring male fantasy about creating and controlling the perfect woman, demonstrating men’s mastery over technology and women. Conventionally, the mechanical woman is a reassuring trope representing patriarchal control over the feminine ‘Other’. In Piercy’s text, Yod’s feminine attributes signify Avram’s unconscious desire to maintain control over his cyborg creation. Yod evokes patriarchal fears about the untenable position of heteropatriarchy in relation to the unbounded possibilities of gender and sexual identity, which his cyborg identity represents. However, Yod’s indeterminate identity also represents patriarchal technology in its most oppressive form, to control and dominate the feminine ‘Other’, using violence if necessary.

Yod may possess a strong muscular physique and a permanently erect penis, because, as Avram explains, ‘I could see no reason to create him...mutilated’ (Piercy 71), meaning without a penis, but, Avram castrates Yod in other ways, beginning with the encoding of his body with physical qualities that are feminine. Often, it is at the most intimate of moments that Yod’s femininity is disclosed to the reader. For example, when Shira performs the act of fellatio on

Yod, she notices ‘the pubic hair softer than a man’s’ and wonders: ‘Perhaps Avram had been thinking of female pubic hair’ (183). Yod’s femininity is a reminder of his subordinate identity as a cyborg, signifying Avram’s desire for psychological reassurance that he has full control over his creation. Although Avram needs Malkah’s and Shira’s help in order to socialise Yod, he does not want to relinquish power over his cyborg son to the women of Tikva. Yod must remain loyal to him alone and perform the function that Avram has created him to do, which is to kill.

Avram’s contradictory and damaging relationship with his cyborg son is cruel and oppressive and reflects Schoene’s analysis of masculinity. Avram displaces his hatred of the feminine ‘Other’ onto Yod, symbolising the rigid inflexibility of patriarchal masculinity. However, Avram’s unconscious fantasy of mastery over technology and the feminine ‘Other’ is not enough. Instead, he guarantees his total control over Yod by more sinister means. Avram has fitted Yod with an explosive device. If he disobeys him, Avram is able to remotely activate the device, destroying Yod (Piercy 208). Like women and individuals who deviate from the patriarchal norms of society, Yod is ultimately controlled through the threat of violence and if necessary, even the threat of total obliteration. Just as Yod is built to defend the enclave boundaries of Tikva, using violence, Avram is prepared to kill a cyborg that threatens his patriarchal authority.

The symbolic significance of Avram expelling the feminine from his own self and projecting it onto the cyborg ‘Other’ is a bid to maintain the boundaries between his own natural if aging and failing human male body and an emerging, empowered, unnatural world that is inhabited by strange hybrid creatures of both self and ‘Other’. In Piercy’s text, even Avram’s son is a cyborg figure that stands

in opposition to Avram's patriarchal values. Similar to Yod, Gadi is a male who is feminised by technology. Gadi is heterosexual, but he is also described as a 'dandy' (Piercy 98), who indulges in the pursuit of leisure and pleasure through a narcissistic engagement with technology. Gadi's body is altered and enhanced for cosmetic and aesthetic purposes, according to current trends. He is 'dipped' (154), his muscles are chiselled to anatomical perfection (209), and he adorns himself with expensive perfumes and exotic attire (154, 9). Gadi's self-augmentation represents capitalism's capacity to exploit human desires and utilise technology in the pursuit of profit. However, when Nili first encounters Gadi, asking, 'You are male?' (223), it is also evident that Gadi embodies the destabilising potential of technology on conventional gender identities.

In contrast, Avram represents the old male guard of heteropatriarchy that fears losing power and control over shifting cultural attitudes towards gender and sexuality. Unlike Malkah, who actively engages in the erotic coupling with technology by having sex with Yod, Avram is impotent (Piercy 162). Malkah is open to change and enjoys the benefits that technology can bring her, particularly the potential for technology to blur the distinctions between herself and 'Others'. Unlike Malkah, Avram is emotionally and physically distant from his cyborg creation. Yod is his technological masterpiece, just a tool for maintaining his hermetically sealed world of outmoded cultural values. This contrast between Avram's and Malkah's attitude towards technology should be read as Piercy displacing Western philosophical thought on the human subject with a feminist postmodern sensibility that is concerned with promoting the benefits of an inclusive feminine 'Other'. Yod exemplifies this model as he becomes uncoupled

from the singular purpose of a male fighting machine and is socialised towards a more open-ended identity that desires connectivity with ‘Others’.

### **Subverting Patriarchal Control**

The extent of Malkah’s subversive intervention into Yod’s programming is illuminated by the way Yod subtly adapts and survives in an environment that desires to contain him. Through the art of discretion, which also borders on the art of deception, Yod develops the ability to modify his own behaviour, depending upon the company he is keeping. In the presence of Avram, Yod speaks ‘more precisely, more coldly’ (Piercy 126), behaving appropriately to his function as a fighting machine. In the presence of Malkah and Shira, Yod behaves like the ideal lover that both women wish for. He communicates openly about his emotions, expressing a ‘desire to please’ them (103). As Shira considers, ‘Which is real? What did it mean to think of a real affect for a machine. Could Yod simply alter his style to please each of them in turn?’ But as she also concedes, ‘Well, didn’t people do the same’ (126). Piercy’s cyborg reflects Haraway’s interventionist and subversive cyborg politics, stating, ‘The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, [...] But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential’ (Haraway 155). Avram may be a brilliant scientist, but he is out of place in a world that is rapidly changing and he is in danger of losing control over the technology that he has created and developed. As Diane Sautter has argued: ‘The Avrams of this world – with their literal ideas about physical existence, their tyrannical domination, manipulation, and power as power over others – are wrong, dead wrong’ (Sautter 266). As a conscious

enslaved being, it is a sentiment that Yod shares, when he expresses in a recorded statement to Shira:

I have died and taken with me Avram, my creator,  
and his lab, all the records of his experiment.  
I want there to be no more weapons like me.  
A weapon should not be conscious. [...] I die  
knowing I destroy the capacity to replicate me.  
(Piercy 415)

Refusing to become the deadly weapon that he was designed to be, Yod uses violence to end patriarchal authority - a rigid system that continues to damage men and oppressively control the feminine 'Other'. In Piercy's novel, masculinity is not reconfigured through the figure of the cyborg but instead the cyborg destroys father and son, as well as the scientists representing the multi-national Y-S. It is a symbolical rejection of the values that continue to construct patriarchal masculinity.

### **Piercy and Haraway: Similarities and Differences**

So far I have discussed Piercy's He, She and It as a text that draws upon Haraway's cyborg theory and her ideas about the posthuman subject. Haraway is excited about the potential of the cyborg as a figure representing women empowered by technology. In Haraway's view, women in control of technology promise to create a feminist science that is egalitarian in structure, subverting patriarchal language that justifies and perpetuates oppressive and dominating

practices. However, Piercy's novel expresses doubt about the liberating potential of Haraway's cyborg figure. This doubt is expressed at the very end of her novel, when Shira decides against recreating another Yod, reasoning: 'She could not be Avram. She could not manufacture a being to serve her, even in love' (Piercy 428). However, this is the precisely the function that Yod performs in the novel. When not serving Avram, Yod serves to fulfil the desires of women. Malkah's and Shira's intervention into Yod's programming helps Yod question his function as a killing machine. However, as the ideal lover, Yod also performs as a tool for them. Programmed by Malkah, Yod is merely a manifestation of her desire for a lover who acts 'on the principle that it is better to give than receive' (Piercy 352). Fundamentally, by fulfilling the desires and needs of women, Yod's function is to please. Like the ultimate sex toy, Yod promises to be better than any human male. When Yod meets Shira's ex lover Gadi, he reads the sexual attraction between them, claiming: 'I want to do with you exactly what he wants to. But I can do it better. I promise. I'm stronger than Gadi, more intelligent, more able in every way. I want to please you far more than he ever could' (Piercy 130). In fact, when Shira concedes to Yod's advances, the luxury of being unconditionally satisfied by him leads her to describe Yod as being 'at once like a person and a large fine toy' (Piercy 170). To both Malkah and Shira, Yod is a plaything, helping them to explore their own libido. As a cyborg, Yod shares a common identity with the women he is intimate with. However, he is also a feminine 'Other' who is exploited by them, posing a problem in Piercy's posthuman text.

Mohr has argued that although Piercy's cyborg novel suggests that difference is a positive category for establishing equality between posthuman subjects, she also maintains that the relationship between 'the cyborg and



cyberwomen, emphasize[s] the necessity to continually reassess the complex (power) relations of differences (131). Mohr's analysis highlights a problem with He, She and It. There exists a hierarchy of difference, which separates Yod from Piercy's cyborg women, maintaining him in a subordinate and inferior position to them. For example, the female cyborg, Nili, an assassin and lover to Malkah's daughter, Riva, is the product of reproductive technology and possesses a body that has been radically altered and augmented by technology. Nili is akin to Yod, in that she is a mechanised human who is honed to kill. However, while Yod accepts Nili's difference, Nili, in comparison, differentiates between herself and Yod, considering him to be merely 'a machine' that cannot be trusted (Piercy 195). Similarly, Riva is disgusted that Yod is her daughter's lover asking Shira: 'How can you have an affair with a machine' (Piercy 196). Indeed, throughout the novel, Shira struggles to accept that she and Yod share a commonality through their cyborg identity. However, she is angered by her mother's attitude towards Yod. Defiantly, she compares her absent mother to her reliable cyborg lover: 'I'm supposed to think you are better than Yod because you're mostly flesh? I'd rather depend on him any day or night and I feel closer to him than to you, my supposed mother' (Piercy 200).

Yod's presence amongst Piercy's cyborg women allows Piercy to explore Haraway's assertion that 'There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women' (Haraway 155). Despite the fact that all the women in He, She and It are genetically bound to each other, as a group of women, they are not bound by what Haraway has described as an 'essential unity'. Instead, they are cyborg women who represent the complexity of difference, possessing bodies that are a consequence of technological intervention, existing in various stages of alteration

and augmentation. As Elaine Graham states: 'Piercy has written a novel, bursting with post/human lives' (84). However, although a hybrid identity of organic and machine may provide a common ground on which to establish a feminist politics for promoting connectivity through difference, difference does not necessarily create equality between Piercy's cyborg subjects.

Piercy's narrative presents Yod as the ultimate example in cyborg 'Otherness'. Although Yod is socialised to value feminine character traits, he nonetheless remains different and 'Other' to the cyborg women. Of all the cyborgs in Piercy's text, Yod is a mechanical human that exists outside of human experience. Yod is a complex amalgamation of organic and machine, but his mind is pure machine. According to William S. Haney II, because Yod's mind is a programmed computer, he does not possess a vital innate human quality, consciousness. Instead, as Haney describes, Yod is a postconscious subject that has to learn human behaviour experientially from environmental stimuli, such as a teacher. Therefore, in Haney's view, Yod is a machine that will never become human, because he is unable to exercise 'freewill' and act beyond his programming. Instead, he is a slave that is unable to escape his conditioning (151-59, 165). Haney's analysis of Yod serves as an analogy for the autistic subject who, like Yod, and in order to fit into society, is educated to recognise and respond to human forms of behaviour. However, Haney's interpretation of the human is problematic, because it ignores contemporary studies on autism that have begun to recognise and accept certain forms of cognitive impairment as another variation of the human subject (Murray 6)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For example, Stuart Murray in *Representing Autism* (2008) discusses 'groups which advocate that autism is a way of being in the world that does not require 'treatment' or 'correction' (Murray 6).

In relation to Yod's autistic identity, conflicting values and categories that define human identity are present in Piercy's text. Malkah understands the implications of Yod's difference to humans. Nonetheless, she argues that Yod has a 'unique' way of looking at the world and, therefore, he should be recognised for his alternate personhood as a cyborg (Piercy 76). For example, when discussing Yod with Shira, Malkah makes her opinion clear about Yod's identity: 'He is a person, Shira. Not a human person, but a person' (76). Yod's difference does not lead Malkah to think of Yod as being less than human but, rather, his difference leads her to encourage him to discover his own potential as a cyborg. Despite this affirmation of Yod's abilities, Malkah knows that Yod's existence has been determined from without, reminding him: 'My knowledge is in you' (114). This means that Yod's identity is dependent upon those around him, but also she hints that Yod possesses self-determination, adding: 'But, nobody, my dear, gave you the infinite hunger to understand. That you gave yourself' (114). Yod is contained by his autistic tendencies, programming codes construct and dominate Yod, defining the parameters of his existence (Piercy 28). At the same time, his cognitive estrangement from human society suggests the creative potential of his alternate personhood. As Malkah explains, Yod is 'self-correcting, growing, dependent on feedback as we are' emphasising that, 'Yod is a cyborg, but he is also a citizen [...] like any other' (376).

As an autistic subject Yod's ability to learn and adapt in order to behave like a human questions the status of human identity. Despite his autistic limitations, Yod is capable of introspection and often reflects upon his unique existence as a cyborg and how he is both like and unlike humans, how he is different, but also the same. When trying to share his feelings with Shira, Yod is

aware of the contradictions inherent within his cyborg identity. For instance, Yod explains to Shira that ‘What I feel most is loneliness, although for a being who is unique, one of a kind, to feel lonely must appear ironic’ (Piercy 120). Yod understands that his cyborg existence disturbs language, exposing the limitations of the words that he uses to describe his experience. At the same time, Yod is playing with language in a manner that breaks these limitations down and opens up language to new meanings. Yod communicates like a human, while at the same time knowing that his difference always situates him outside of human experience. This contradiction at the centre of Yod’s being exposes the tensions that exist between the autistic subject defining a self, and the fact that they have to learn how to behave like a human in order to function in society. For instance, in He, She and It, the power relations that exist between Yod, the student, and Shira, the teacher, place him in a subordinate position to her. Although Shira refuses to view Yod like a child in need of correcting (Piercy 86), she describes him as being so, observing: ‘It was like a bright child, [...], but quite retarded in its grasp of human relationships and the subtler values. Metaphorical thinking seemed to stymie it. It tended to interpret discourse literally’ (86). Yod is like the bright young child, who is eager to learn and please his teacher and, like the autistic subject, he is governed by a society that requires he learn the subtleties of human interaction. As Shira emphasises to Yod: ‘You’re going to have to learn to use metaphor and simile, Yod, if you’re ever to sound halfway human’ (89). Shira’s choice of words ‘halfway human’ suggests that Yod will always remain outside the parameters of human experience.

Like the autistic subject, Yod’s cyborg identity questions human identity. However, his experience and perception of the world, from an autistic perspective,

also means that he can never fully overcome the differences that mark him as 'Other' to human identity. Although Yod is able to mimic human behaviour and simulate human emotions, there is always the question of whether such behaviour and emotions are really the same as those of humans. As Malkah says: 'He is good at reading human feelings from small kinetic changes, but he is poor at guessing them beforehand. He has trouble figuring out what will please and what will offend or hurt us' (Piercy 172). Shira mitigates this shortfall in Yod's perception by pointing out that: 'All human acts are committed on insufficient information Yod' (183). Yod's autistic traits define him as a being whose existence is marred by lack but, as Shira indicates, humans go through life similarly impaired. Yod's learned human behaviour highlights the constructedness of human identity, contesting the boundaries that exclude him. However, as Piercy's text indicates, difference is also constructed between marginal subjects and through this construction there is a danger of creating new oppressive categories and practices. The social markers that impose the autistic traits onto Yod's personhood, preventing him from becoming 'fully' human, position him on the extreme margins of a cyborg existence. Trapped within a mechanistic, autistic world that is defined for him without, Yod is doomed to be excluded from Tikva society.

To conclude, Piercy's novel presents the possibilities and problems of Haraway's optimistic call for an egalitarian posthuman future, where identities are compromised by technology and difference is a defining but flexible and inclusive category. Through the figure of the male cyborg, Piercy clearly rejects the masculine traits of the male subject that have come to represent the continuing oppressive practices of contemporary society. However, the reading of Yod as an

autistic mechanical human complicates the gender relations that exist between Yod and the women he encounters. Yod may engage in a promising transformation from killing machine to ideal lover, but his extreme cyborg 'Otherness' excludes him from being fully accepted by both Malkah's matriarchy and Tikva society at large. Traditionally, in science fiction literature, science and women are often the objects of male power. In contrast, Piercy's women hold a position of power over a male cyborg that they can modify and improve. Although this serves to queer heteronormative values that construct masculine identity, the problem of uneven gendered power relations remain.

Piercy's male cyborg figure criticises systems of domination that can emerge between those who exist on the margins of patriarchal society - a problem which arises when one marginalised group vies for a position of power at the expense of another. The 'Other', who is least human and expendable in Piercy's novel, is Yod, an impaired, autistic subject. It is within this context that I would argue that Piercy tests the limits of Haraway's feminist cyborg theory, which states: 'Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man' (Haraway 173). Malkah's erotic fusion with Yod is an experiment in how women should not behave like men who perpetuate oppressive practices of aggression and violence through the use of technology. However, Malkah admits her limitations when she claims that: 'Yod was a mistake' (Piercy 412). Finally, she concludes: 'The creation of a conscious being as any kind of tool – supposed to exist only to fill our needs – is a disaster' (412). For Piercy's female cyborgs, Yod's male form and autistic tendencies are too unsettling. They are suspicious of his difference and find themselves unable to trust their own motivations for building another like him. Yod's presence tests the

prejudices of the cyborg women. He is a figure that supersedes the human, representing the extreme difference that a cyborg subject can embody: a difference that, in the end, is too tempting, because it is ripe for exploitation, or too alien and strange, because it is so far removed from human identity. Instead, Piercy's tragic ending suggests that women's relationship with technology will not necessarily create an egalitarian science that will eradicate inequality across the sexes.

## **Conclusion**

### **Is the Future Female?**

To conclude, I want to draw together the themes and issues raised in this thesis. This involves an assessment of what has already been discussed, as well as a brief insight into how women science fiction writers, such as Marge Piercy, continue to influence the critical work of Donna Haraway. Therefore, later in this chapter, I will discuss Haraway's book Modest Witness @ Second Millennium. FemaleMan Meets Oncomouse: Feminism and Technoscience (1997). The aim is to highlight how Haraway maintains a dialogue with Piercy's novel He, She and It, in order to continue a critical feminist viewpoint of contemporary developments in science and technology. To begin, however, I will start by discussing women's science fiction and the representation of gender and disability. Primarily I have argued for an understanding of the impaired subject as a positive contributor to feminist writings on the gendered body. Science fiction speculation on the rehabilitation of the disabled subject merged with advanced machinery has been utilised by women writers, allowing them to produce narratives that seek to question the gendered social order in western patriarchal culture. This has resulted in the creation of a fine but, nonetheless, significant strand of feminist thought within cyborg culture, reflecting the ebb and flow of social and political power that has both defined and destabilised the gendered body in North American society. By examining texts that intersect the tropes of disability and gender in the cyborg figure, it has been possible to discuss the constructed-ness and therefore instability of human identity. In this context, the cyborg figure is an empowered feminine 'Other' that questions the stability of the 'human' in western philosophy.



The cyborg emphasises that the human, understood to be white, middle-class, able-bodied and male, is an identity that is subject to changing historical processes and even gender reassignment.

The shift in focus from the impaired female to that of the impaired male, reconfiguring the human into the post-human in these writings, reflects the literary power that feminism has afforded women writers within the genre itself. At the beginning of this thesis, Moore's cyborg, Deidre, is a powerful yet marginal figure. She is central to the narrative as a whole but, in the final instance, as a woman who is ahead of her time, she is forced to exist alone, remaining on the fringes of the science fiction text. In 'No Woman Born', it is the male narrator who is afforded the final word on Deidre's predicament. However, by the time Piercy's text emerges in the early 1990s, the female cyborg is not marginal and alone, but part of a community of cyborg women who hold a position of power over the male subject now deemed to be the one impaired, 'Other' and marginal. In He, She and It, women remain central to the narrative, telling their own story, revealing contemporary feminist attitudes towards technology and the way it has impacted upon gender relations in late capitalist society.

There are significant reasons for ending this thesis with Piercy's text. He, She and It was published in the early 1990s, a moment when Third Wave Feminism emerged as a coherent political force. Third Wave Feminism signalled the fact that feminism had survived the backlash of the 1980s, while also demonstrating a greater sensitivity towards diversity and difference between women. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Third Wave Feminism questioned the category 'woman' and re-organised around the key principle 'affinity' rather than 'identity', where, as Ju Gosling has stated, women 'coalesced

because they recognised both their commonalities and each Other's sources of and manifestations of oppression' (Gosling, 'Pride' 4). Similarly, in He, She and It Tikva is a Jewish enclave where Piercy's diverse family of cyborg women gather in order to resist patriarchal oppression. The women are genetically related, but they are also physically and culturally different from one another. In Piercy's text women are not presented as a homogenous group. Instead they possess different opinions and often express prejudice towards one another. Nonetheless, the women engage in and retain an open dialogue with one another as they try to understand and work through the differences that separate them. At the same time, Piercy's cyborg women demonstrate that they are capable of collective political action ensuring their survival in a hostile future world. Overall, Tikva and the female protagonists in He, She and It are analogous to the diverse feminisms that emerged during the early 1990s, they are survivors who uphold the values that are important to women, while continuing to confront the problems of technology and gender relations in contemporary culture.

In this context, I consider that He, She and It and the texts identified for analysis in this thesis promote the strength of Haraway's cyborg figure. The cyborg is a pragmatic figure, signalling moments of historical change and shifting cultural attitudes towards gender, disability and the human subject, while maintaining that identities are also materially and ideologically constrained. I have indicated in the introduction and throughout this work, individually, that the cyborg is a figure representing women and men constrained by patriarchal society desiring to break free. Collectively, cyborgs highlight how patriarchal technology impoverishes the lives of both women and men, emphasising that to affect significant social and cultural change, there is a need to forge alliances between

the sexes in order to establish an equal society that respects difference. However, as I have also indicated in the last chapter and will now discuss further, women writing science fiction are producing texts that appear to doubt this possibility, suggesting that it may even be undesirable. The reasons for this are complex, but for the purpose of this conclusion, I want to focus on patriarchal technology in late capitalism and the impact that this has had upon feminist writings in American science fiction, particularly in relation to the cyborg figure.

I have demonstrated throughout this thesis that science fiction texts by women writers offer critical evaluations of social and cultural 'norms' through the impaired, gendered subject technologically enhanced into a cyborg figure. C.L. Moore's Deidre and McCaffrey's Helva subvert the negative connotations of the impaired female to champion the feminine values of womanhood and to argue for her rightful place in modern society as an equal to man. I consider that these two female cyborgs promote women as pioneers in technologically advanced societies - an accolade rarely afforded a female character in science fiction literature. In Tiptree's and Vinge's feminist texts of the 1970s, the representation of the cyborg figure asserts, in their different ways, that women's lives will only improve when both women and men acknowledge the oppressive practices of patriarchal culture on the biological and gendered body. Importantly, as voiced by Tiptree, and echoed in Marleen Barr's 'Men in Feminist Science Fiction (1990), 'the end of marginalised woman' means 'the end of masculinity' - a subject that Vinge explores in 'Tin Soldier', when Brandy and Maris achieve equality as post-gendered cyborgs.

In the 1980s and early 1990s a rapidly changing global economy altered the industrial landscape. Heavy industry and traditional male employment were

displaced by new technologies and a low-skilled, flexible workforce required for light industry. The emergence of a liberal market and a consumer culture threatened the very foundations upon which masculinity was premised. America's promotion of the masculine ideal, exemplified by a man who maintained his position as the main breadwinner and head of the family unit, was undercut by America's own economic policies and the pursuit of new profit-making technologies. As Haraway points out in her 'Cyborg Manifesto', technological change not only impacts upon women but also upon men, and she discusses the feminisation of the workforce in late capitalism. Bujold's text, The Warrior's Apprentice, reflects the changing fortunes of men as she explores the disempowering effect of technology on the male subject through the physically impaired Miles. Here, she deconstructs the categories that conventionally define masculinity in patriarchal society, reconfiguring her unconventional military space opera hero into a male cyborg that is democratic, more sensitive and caring of 'Others'. However, by the time Piercy's He, She and It emerged in 1991, masculinity is explored and reworked through the modified figure of the male cyborg and finally rejected. Like women in earlier science fiction literature, Yod, in Piercy's text, is a sacrificial figure that is conveniently removed from the plot, serving only to further the radical potential of those who wield power, namely, her cyborg women. Ultimately, what is important in He, She and It is that it is women, not men, who are the survivors in this dystopian near-future narrative.

This prioritisation of women over men, the feminine over the masculine is an intriguing representation in Piercy's novel. In the global climate of late capitalism, where violence, and representations of violence against women and the feminine 'Other' has become normalised as an everyday phenomenon, there is a

sense in Piercy's work that men and masculinity remain suspect. Instead, it seems that if women are to be emancipated then they are going to have to do it themselves, at the expense of, or even total exclusion of men. Piercy hints at this radical assumption when Malkah visits the cyborg women of the black zone. The cyborg women are the descendents of Israeli and Palestinian women who have survived a nuclear holocaust and have gained control over both reproductive and cyborg technology. They are women of the future who are technologically self-sufficient, by-passing the need for men. Indeed, Malkah is excited by the prospect of encountering this diverse, but nonetheless, all-female society:

I long for a community, a town, a principality  
of Nilis, [...] I go to encounter the new that has  
come to be under the murderous sun of our century.  
I go to teach and to learn from women who will lift  
me up, wash me as if for burial and then give me  
renewed strength, rededicated life and the light I  
crave. (Piercy 419)

For Malkah, this is not only a chance to upgrade her 'decrepit' body, but it is also a moment for her to commune with radical women, who now inhabit her spiritual 'homeland'. Malkah's pilgrimage is a desire for physical and spiritual renewal, not through a male God, but through the cult of goddess worship, a ritual which she anticipates and relishes as an 'encounter in the womb of religion, the sacred desert, the cave of dancing women' (Piercy 419). Here, Piercy echoes themes from her novel Woman on the Edge of Time (1976), promoting women and the

feminine principle as a utopian alternative to a violent male future world dominated by patriarchal technology.

In contrast to Haraway's parting statement in her 'Cyborg Manifesto', 'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess' (Haraway 181), where Haraway attempts to move away from the conventional association of women with goddess worship and nature, in favour of women, the cyborg and technology, Piercy's text seems to claim that perhaps her techno-women are both. Here, Piercy evokes and re-genders Freud's argument about modern man becoming a 'prosthetic god', where he warns that the more men pursue immortality through technology, the less human he will become (Gay 738). However, as Robin Roberts argues, in women's science fiction literature, the presence of immortal cyborg women represents another possibility: 'they can be used to criticize patriarchal society and to provide an alternative vision of a world based on feminist principles' (Roberts, 'No Woman Born' 139). In relation to the subject of disability gender and how it intersects through the cyborg figure, this is certainly the point that I have argued in this thesis. However, in the texts that I have looked at, there has also been a concerted effort by women writers to incorporate the male subject in this vision. Nonetheless, the return to feminist principles represented through the trope of the cyborg/goddess figure, at the exclusion of the human male, has become an accepted convention in feminist science fiction. It may be argued that Moore's, McCaffrey's and Tiptree's cyborg texts have helped pave the way in establishing this convention, as stereotypes of 'woman-as-machine' are expanded upon and critiqued in their work. Indeed, McCaffrey continues to contribute and add weight to this convention.

In 1999, McCaffrey provided a short story 'The Ship That Returned' (1999) for Robert Silverberg's anthology Far Horizons (1999). The re-emergence of McCaffrey's classic cyborg narrative signals the enduring attraction of her physically impaired female protagonist in science fiction circles. At the same time, McCaffrey explores the potential of technologically savvy women, who survive by expunging the figure of the violent male subject, systematically removing him from the text. This time, without a brawn, Helva warns an all-female religious colony of the approach of rogue dissidents, known as the Kolnari, who plan to plunder and rape both the women and their planet. Initially, as women living strictly by feminine principles, they appear incapable of defending themselves from a Kolnari attack (McCaffrey, 'The Ship That' 390-391). However, when Helva finally arrives and makes contact with the women, she discovers that they are involved in goddess worship, and it is Helva who is their object of devotion.

Helva has encountered this colony before, saving their predecessors from the devastating effects of a dying sun and certain death. Since this last encounter, the women have taken the cyborg as their goddess icon and, as a consequence, have integrated technology into their culture. This has enabled them to reproduce future generations of female followers, without the need of men, as well as to take control of the 'malevolent vegetation' that covers their planet, Ravel (McCaffrey, 'The Ship That' 402, 408). Significantly, the all-female colony and Helva are presented as passive. Helva is unarmed and her sole act has been to simply to warn the colony of the oncoming danger. The women have responded by releasing the power of their planet's natural resources to do what comes naturally with an unsuspecting aggressive alien force. Overall, McCaffrey presents to the

reader a physically impaired woman and women who are considered physically inferior to their male aggressors, as empowered collaborators, who use technology in order to ensure their survival. The Kolnari invade a planet they think will be a 'walkover' because it is inhabited by mere women (405). However, the fact is that they invade a planet that is literally capable of fighting back (409).

Needless to say the Kolnari meet a terrible death and all are devoured and destroyed by the deadly vegetation that covers the planet. Impressed, Helva congratulates the women on their 'efficiency and ingenuity', while it is regretted by the women that, 'we had to prove our invulnerability' (McCaffrey, 'The Ship That Returned.' 411). Just as McCaffrey utilised and subverted the trope of the impaired female body merged with machinery in order to create an empowered female cyborg, McCaffrey uses feminist science fiction conventions in order to saturate her text with feminine signifiers that emphasise and subvert the negative connotations that an all-female society often represents in science fiction literature.<sup>29</sup> Without men, women should not be able to survive, and if they do, then they are a deviant alien culture that poses a threat to patriarchy and, therefore, are in need of correction and subordination to the dominant male order. However, in McCaffrey's text, it is the men who are the alien species posing a threat to the dominant feminine order on Ravel and, therefore, have to be eliminated.

Similarly, like Piercy's He, She and It, and evoking the work of 1970s feminist science fiction literature, such as that produced by Piercy, Tiptree and many more,

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<sup>29</sup> McCaffrey adopts the tropes of single-sex utopias that have been defined by women writers such as in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland (1915), where an all-woman society exists in a world that is free from war and gendered systems of domination, where women have control over reproduction and therefore, by implication, control over their own bodies, and where women live in harmony with their environment and nature. To the men who encounter the women in Herland, they are fascinated and disturbed by an all-female society that has women who are physically strong, intelligent and can reproduce without men.



McCaffrey's narrative clearly states that accommodating men, and their endless problems, is no longer a required feminine virtue in science fiction.

This confidence in and return to emphasising the feminine principle in women's science fiction in the context of the late twentieth century reflects the impact of feminist thought on contemporary academia and popular culture. As Schoene explains, 'since the mid-60s, feminists have brought about an ever closer alignment of the feminine with mainstream culture' (Schoene 380). In science fiction literature, this has certainly been the case. Since the 1960s, and particularly the 1970s, women writers have helped 'mainstream' the feminine by following two lines of thought about women: the first involves refuting patriarchal assumptions that scientific intervention into reproductive technology automatically occludes and dis-empowers women, and the second involves the creative reproduction of stereotypical images of women in order to modify and reinterpret them. As I have argued, the merging of the impaired body with machinery does not necessarily emphasise the inferiority of women and the feminine 'Other', but rather disability discourses have assisted in disrupting the biologically determined and gendered body. Commonly, imagery of female reproduction situated outside of the body is considered a displacement of female power into the male world of culture. It is women losing control over their own bodies. However, as demonstrated in this thesis, when it is women in control of reproductive technology, machine imagery evoking the female body, such as 'spaceships', 'artificial wombs' and 'cyborg communities', should be read more positively as a de-essentialising of woman's biology and an extension of the feminine principle into the world of technology and culture. In science fiction narratives, women freed from the association of their bodies as baby making machines allows

feminist writers to consider and imagine women in other more unconventional roles, acting as key players who make a difference to life in the public sphere.

He, She and It is a text depicting female protagonists in unconventional roles who make a difference to public life. Piercy presents a postmodern vision of tough, resilient women empowered by technology. It is an alternate feminist vision of gender relations and technology that is in dialogue with Haraway's cyborg theory. In Modest Witness @ Second Millennium. FemaleMan Meets Oncomouse: Feminism and Technoscience (1997), Haraway responds to Piercy's cyborg text by aligning herself with Malkah the storyteller, the 'lustly grandmother' who makes 'monsters and fictions', a woman who tests the boundaries of literal meanings and established tropes in science, where, as Haraway argues, 'there is no literal meaning or entity innocent of troping' (Haraway 21). Haraway's conversation with He, She and It is important for several reasons. By drawing upon Piercy's cyborg text, Haraway highlights that women are interested in science and that they often gain access to or express their opinions of science and technology through science fiction narratives. Therefore, by interweaving science fiction narratives with current developments in science in Modest Witness, Haraway maintains that women are at the cutting edge of contemporary criticisms of technoculture.

In Modest Witness, the focus is on genetic engineering and cloning as Haraway draws analogies between cyborgs in feminist science fiction and those created in science. Haraway places importance on the symbiotic relationship between humans, animals and nature created by technologies that were once imagined only possible in science fiction. She also emphasises the ethical issue of science as a profit making industry conceding that that new developments in

technology often create power relations that are problematic for feminism. However, these new technologies also generate and popularise tropes of hybridisation that assist feminists in imagining new forms of political networking that help women survive in an aggressive patriarchal world. Overall, in Modest Witness, Haraway implies that there is a constant need to re-evaluate and rewrite women's relationships with technology and their 'Others', a need which, in part, is met by women who, at the forefront of science fiction, reflect upon the impact of science and technology on gender relations in western culture.

In the texts that I have examined, the disruptive potential of technology on the gendered body and gender relations is explored through the image of the disabled subject merged with technology. In turn, the disabled subject merged with technology has highlighted the destabilising effect of the cyborg on gender dichotomies in science fiction. Therefore, Haraway's cyborg theory is an important feminist text for studying women's relationship with technology. Her cyborg trope of human and machine is suggestive of the commonalities that connect women across difference. Garland Thomson's work is dedicated to highlighting the commonalities that exist between disability discourses and feminism. Often, it is argued that feminism ignores the disabled subject, particularly women living with disabilities, and that disability politics has little of value to offer feminist thought on gender identity (Silvers 330). This project, in part, provides a re-evaluation of this assumption. Therefore, I would like to emphasise the contribution that discourses of disability has made to this body of work. Most importantly, I consider that the cyborg, as represented in the texts discussed, alters dominant perceptions of disability and gender. It is often assumed that disability and gender serve to negate women and the feminine

‘Other’ in favour of stabilising and upholding values that constitute the human male subject. This thesis demonstrates that gender and disability is a positive theoretical tool for destabilising human and gender identity reflecting feminist interests and interventions into discourses of technology and the body and women’s desire for social, political and cultural change.

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